

# Asylum

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**Summary:** Upon recovering his memories of Kira, Raito has a terrible choice to make. What he does choose throws him into a realm of insanity and suddenly it's the God of the New World that needs the rescuing--and L is the only one who can help. LxRaito REPOSTED

## \*Chapter 1\*: Origin

### Chapter 1

Disclaimer For Every Chapter in the Whole World: I own nothing. We can all understand this, right? I don't have to keep saying it, right?

A/N: Edited and reposted as of 8/25/09

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asylum:

1. an institution for the maintenance and care of the mentally ill, orphans, or other persons requiring specialized assistance
  2. an inviolable refuge, as formerly for criminals and debtors; sanctuary
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L knows that he cannot expect Raito to remain unchanged, not after five years of living in an institute for the criminally insane. He knows that the aggressive therapy tactics and the days of solitude (his one request after the trial being that Raito would have a singular cell; L is still unsure whether he'd meant this as punishment or a small favor), all those months of living with people uglier, angrier, meaner, and older than he was would twist Raito into an entirely different creature.

There is no juvenile asylum for mass murderers, and L isn't sure that he would've sent Raito to one if it had been available.

Regardless, Raito had been tried as an adult and, upon his own confession and the exposure of the Death Note, he'd been convicted of all his thousands of murders. The judge had been prepared to sentence him to death, something that Kira, killer of thousands and molder of societies, certainly deserved. Had been about to receive.

And then L had intervened.

He isn't certain, even now, why he did that. L isn't certain about many things when it comes to Yagami Raito who is Kira.

However, he can remember with perfect clarity, that rainy November 5th five years ago when all this mess had begun.

The rain itself was rather inconsequential, since L had no patience for fussy weather of any sort. But that day he could *feel* death creeping behind him and every time he'd turn his back on Raito, the hairs on the back of his neck would rise. He'd felt an aching sort of melancholy settle around him, and he knew that if he didn't get out of that room, *now*, he was going to absolutely lose it.

He had just wanted to *scream*, and just cry, and throw a tantrum and whine, all at once. It wasn't *fair*; he'd risked everything for this case and now it turned out the odds had never been in his favor. Yagami Raito and the Kira case had always been a gamble, but L had been confident . . .

Yes. Well. That confidence had almost killed him.

He had begun to speak of bells, but Raito had seemed not to hear him. L hadn't really cared much; he was always startled at how comfortable he felt around this beautiful, deadly boy. And he needed to speak anyway—he, L, who usually kept his silences until the even the most patient of personalities was driven to speak, to hum, to do something to fill the void. He couldn't keep quiet, not when he could feel death so so near.

After waiting for him to pause for some time, Raito had finally just interrupted him mid-sentence, and the harshness and aching bitterness in his voice had made L stop speaking immediately.

"L."

L had shut his mouth and stared out at the dull scenery, pretending not to see Raito's sudden change in demeanor. Just as he'd hidden the fact that he'd seen Raito struggling for the past week or so—ever since Higuchi's arrest and murder. The boy had lost sleep, and it was apparent in his dramatic weight loss, and dark circles under his eyes that were a smaller, paler version of L's own. He had been losing track of conversations in the past week especially, and had seemed to be ever involved in his own thoughts. And now he was speaking with a voice like the dead.

*Now this will come to an end*, L could remember thinking. *"I thought I had instructed Raito-kun to use the alias 'Ryuuzaki' when he addressed me, did I not?"* he asked.

Raito looked distracted. *"Sorry . . . Ryuuzaki."*

"Yes, Raito-kun?"

*But Raito didn't speak, not for a very long time. His head was bowed as he shivered in the rain, which showed no signs of letting up. L couldn't see his eyes. It bothered him.*

*Finally, Raito looked up, and his face was torn and undecided and . . . and tormented. L felt his pulse quicken.*

*When Raito still didn't speak, only examined L's impassive face with dark eyes, L spoke instead. "What is it, Raito-kun?"* he asked, making his voice sound just a touch gentler than usual. *Raito seemed to respond to such sentiments more often than not.*

*Raito inhaled sharply, then said, "I need to show you something." His shoulders slumped now and he examined the cement at his feet with studious determination.*

*"Show me?"* L asked. *Tone warmer, a little slower.*

*Raito laughed harshly then, startling L. It was not a laugh he'd ever heard from the boy before: bitter and choked, it was the laugh of someone much older, much darker than Raito was supposed to be.*

*"Yes," he said, and now his voice was choked too, as though he was forcing the words through his throat, onto his tongue, and past his lips through sheer willpower. "It's a few miles away from here-"* He stopped again, his words cut off, and he seemed to struggle with himself as L watched, pricks of fear sliding across his skin. *Raito forced himself to speak again. "It has to do with the case,"* he whispered, and L had to strain to hear him over the pounding of rain on hollow metal.

*"What is it?"* L asked. *His own voice was barely above a whisper.*

*Raito's hands clenched at his sides and he still did not look up. "Come with me,"* he forced past his lips. *"I'll show you."*

*"Does Raito-kun mind if I bring a voice recorder on our little excursion?"* L asked, beginning to move towards the door, even as Raito seemed to be frozen in place.

*Suddenly, he was moving, heading to the door, passing L, and laughing again. "Sure, why not?"* he asked. *"Bring a video camera and a filming crew if you think it'll help, Ryuuzaki."*

*L's thumb pressed against his lips as he followed Raito down the stairs. "I am sure that will not be necessary, Raito-kun."*

*When Raito showed no signs of deviating from his path towards the exit, L asked, "Should we not dry off, Raito-kun?"*

*Raito turned around then, faced L, and met his eyes. No hesitation—L could no longer see the hesitation that had been so prevalent earlier this week.*

*His decision had been solidified.*

*A chill raced down L's spine, heightening his awareness of even insignificant details. (To this day, he can still remember the exact outfit Raito was wearing.) It was not because*

L was so spooked by the dull, expressionless facade Raito was currently sporting—it was genuine fear, for his life, for his work, that sparked the shiver spreading goosebumps all over his body.

"Why should we?" Raito rejoined. "We're just going to get wet again."

"Ah," L murmured. "Is it all right with Raito-kun if Watari comes along with us?" Oh God, L did not want to do this, no matter what happened he didn't want to do this. He didn't want to die, he didn't want Watari to die, or Raito to die—

The thought had surprised him, he remembers. So caught up in the misery of his own unavoidable death, L had quite forgotten to consider what would happen if he really did win—the converse situation, of course, would result in Raito's own death.

Raito looked startled, then nodded, his shoulders tightening almost imperceptibly. "Sure," he said. "He can drive us."

And so L made a brief call, and in a few very long minutes, they were on their way, gliding past the near-deserted, rain soaked streets.

The car ride was silent, save for Raito directing Watari in a near whisper. He seemed to grow increasingly anxious as they neared their destination. His leg was shaking, something L had never seen him do, and he was twisting his hands together as they rested in his lap. His eyes were restless as well, snapping from one point of interest in the scenery to another at an alarming speed.

Only once did L try to speak. "Raito-kun?" he asked softly, so quietly even Watari would have trouble hearing him.

Raito's eyes, at once both fierce and empty, mad and dead, snapped to make contact with L's unblinking ones. He didn't speak, only waited for L to continue.

For lack of anything better to say, he asked, "Where are we going?"

Raito didn't answer for a moment, but he did avert his eyes to stare once more out the window. "You'll see," he murmured finally. Seeing L's suspicious expression out of the corner of his eye, Raito laughed again, quieter this time, but still in that chilling, almost deranged manner. "You have nothing to worry about, L," he assured him. "I am past the point where I can do you any harm." His voice, quiet as it was, still rang with the bitter taste of desperation.

L did not answer, because there was no answer for a statement like that. The first possibility was that Raito was lying and was taking L somewhere where he could kill him without suspicion. L found this option highly suspect, since Watari would know exactly where they were, and for how long. But the only other thing L could think of was that this was going to be a confession. And that outcome had only a .02% possibility of occurring. Less if L factored in Raito's potential sociopathic disorders.

Finally, Raito directed Watari to pull over against a curb in front of a large park. Watari had turned to L for instructions; L made a snap decision.

"Watari, if you could please wait for us here?" he'd asked, observing Raito's reaction. He seemed to relax a tiny bit. "And if we are gone for more than an hour, you may assume the worst."

Watari looked startled at receiving such directives, but Raito hadn't blanched at all. He'd only climbed out of the car into the still-pouring rain.

The rain was coming down harder than ever, limiting visibility and making movement squelchy and uncomfortable. L soon found himself soaked anew. Even the accursed shoes he was wearing were squishing as they made their way down a charming garden path.

Suddenly, Raito veered off the marked walkway and headed into thicker foliage. L hesitated, then followed him at a good distance. As the plants began to obscure his view of the path they'd left, however, L stopped. "Raito-kun, I really must ask where we are going," he said.

Raito looked back at him barely able to see him through the cool rain. "I . . . I can't get it out, Ryuuzaki," he answered, his dead voice contorted by the rain. It made him sound sad. "The words, I mean," he continued. "I just . . . we are very nearly there. Can't I just show you?"

L hesitated again. If this was some elaborate act . . . but Watari was standing by. But if Kira killed Watari first . . . then the task force . . .

Unlikely. There was nothing Raito could gain by taking L out here and attempting to murder him with his bare hands. He would be caught almost immediately. And besides, Raito was not behaving like someone about to commit a murder, however good an actor he was.

"Very well," L said, and began to follow him.

"Not far to go now," Raito muttered, only just loud enough that L heard him.

Was this a confession? Raito had played too good a game to simply give up now, unless something had changed without L knowing. Before they'd captured Higuchi, had Raito been acting peculiar? No more than usual, really.

And suddenly, in front of a large tree, Raito stopped. "Here," he announced, and before L could ask him what he was talking about, Raito knelt beneath the tree. L almost knelt next to him, but Raito held up a hand to stop him.

"Wait there," he said, and L noticed that he was trembling, hard. He waited, even more confused as Raito began to dig.

"Raito-kun, what—" L said, when he could not keep his silence any longer. But just as he began to speak, Raito pulled a curious package out of the ground. Quickly, recklessly, he flung it open.

And there, sitting in the thin metal container, in a plastic bag, was . . .

"Death Note," L whispered. His mind reeled. This was not happening. This was a dream, a horrid dream where Raito was the criminal L had always accused him of being. This could not be reality. This was not how L's case was supposed to end. He was pulling the slim black notebook out of its container now, almost reverently, not caring when the rain struck it and began to dampen the cover.

Suddenly, L realized that the situation was potentially dangerous, and he lunged forward. To his surprise, Raito turned held the notebook out to him, still on his knees.

This stopped L. Was this some sort of joke? What on earth would possess Raito to do something like this? Hesitantly, wonderingly, L reached out and took the notebook.

Immediately, a dark figure appeared behind Raito, something L could only assume was a shinigami—which appeared to be mid-rant.

"-is he doing with you, Raito?" the death god was demanding. "You know he can see me now, right? You've lost it, haven't you? Does this mean I don't get apples from you anymore?"

Raito appeared to ignore the shinigami serenely. He was only looking at L.

L was staring at the shinigami, which looked very different and yet horribly the same as Rem. The best he could come up with to say was a very faint, "Good Lord," in his native tongue.

The shinigami began to laugh. "Yeah," it said. "I get that a lot."

"What are you?" L demanded. He knew—he thought he knew—but he'd better make sure before he started really freaking out.

The creature gave him a toothy grin and moved in close enough that the stench of death surrounded him and L turned his head to the side so he could breathe. "Shinigami," it—  
he? Probably a he—informed him. "I'm Ryuk."

It was purely habit that L announced, "I am L."

And the shinigami—Ryuk—was laughing again. "I can see your name, human," he chuckled. "And besides—" L could see him spare a passing glance at Raito, who still said and did nothing-- "I've been watching you for a long time."

Chills; more chills, good God L didn't think he'd ever be warm again.

It was an act of pure willpower, but L forced himself close his gaping mouth and take his eyes off the shinigami—though his gaze kept returning to it despite himself.

Time to get some answers. "Raito-kun," he began. Raito shook his head.

L tried again. "Kira," he said.

Raito nodded, expression hard, still on his knees in front of L. "Yes," he said.

L studied him carefully. Relaxed shoulders, no facial expression, glazed eyes. He was done. Just . . . done, just like that.

Why?

"You are under arrest," L said, and pulled out a pair of handcuffs. Raito—Kira showed no surprise to L having them on his person, nor did he struggle or flinch or try to move away as L stepped behind him and secured the cuffs around his wrists.

"There is one more thing," Raito said, as L locked the restraints around his wrists into place.

"What?" L asked, matching Raito's monotone.

"My watch," Raito said simply. Then, seeing that L was still confused, he instructed, "Take it off and press the knob six times."

With a feeling of gnawing anxiety in the pit of his stomach, L reached down and undid the clasp of his watch, then pulled the little instrument to himself. With one last, curious glance at Raito, L did as he was told.

A compartment popped out. Raito flinched, though he himself had told L to do it. Ryuk watched in silent anticipation. He couldn't be certain—was this still part of Raito's plan to kill the detective? Since he didn't know, it was best to keep his mouth shut.

L extracted the tiny piece of paper and read what was written there. 'Kyouzuke Higuchi' was printed in perfect, if hurried, kanji. "Raito-kun," he whispered. Raito looked back at him steadily. He did not react, and L . . . well, L actually felt a sudden urge to slap the boy.

How dare he? How dare he? Did he think L was incapable of figuring this out on his own? Was he acting still? L felt himself being consumed by his own anger and confusion and all the fear that had been eating him alive narrowed down to this one point, to this one . . . child who had bested him at his own game for so long, and now had the gall to just give up, to just deliver himself into L's custody.

"Other side," Raito whispered, voice barely audible at all.

Struck by a sudden panic, L turned over the tiny piece of paper, and couldn't suppress a cry at what he saw there. Raito flinched back again, but he never took his eyes off of L.

In tiny, delicately written letters, it read, 'L Lawlie-' There was the beginning of the 't' at the end, but it had been left unfinished. L stared at it. Stared at how close his own death was.

It took him several minutes to regain his composure, but when he finally felt like he could speak without babbling, he turned wide eyes on Raito, whose expression was unreadable. "Raito-kun," L whispered, voice barely audible above the rain that was beginning to slow.

Raito did not make any sign that he'd heard L; he just continued staring in that harsh, too-focused way.

"Raito-kun," L tried again. "Why did you . . . why did you not finish?"

Raito stared back at him for a minute, before suddenly, his slender frame shook with soundless, breathy, cruel laughter. L stared at him, shocked, as he bent his head and curved his back so that he was staring at the ground. He was still looking at the dirt beneath him when he answered. "I . . . couldn't . . ." he gasped, the words two sharp punctuations that came between what were now silent sobs. His breath hitched as he spoke, and L grabbed his shoulders and pulled him up to his feet, raising his head so that Raito was forced to look him in the eyes.

"Why?" L demanded, forgetting that he was supposed to sound apathetic.

Raito's silent laughter-sobs continued, and L was shocked at the desperation written clearly across his face. "If you . . . don't know, L . . . I don't suppose . . . there's any point . . . in my . . . telling you."

"Tell me!"

Raito laughed harder. "No," he said, and L shoved him away in disgust. He carefully put the paper back in the watch and slipped the entire contraption into his pocket. He still held the Death Note carefully away from Raito, who had fallen when L had released him. He was standing again, no longer laughing, but still trembling as though he were.

L looked at him coldly.

"And Watari," Raito said, voice shaking, speaking as though he were continuing a conversation. "Quillish Wammy."

L flinched. "Have you written his name?" he demanded, his voice louder than he'd intended. He didn't care, as long as the answer was-

"No," Raito said. "I wanted to write yours first. And I couldn't . . . when I couldn't, it wasn't right to write his. Not when you would live."

"Tell me why," L whispered.

"I want to ask for a favor," Raito said, completely ignoring him.

L stared at him. The sudden change in conversation was unnerving. "What?" he asked, making no promises.

"Make certain I get the death penalty," Raito said, his voice low and pleading. "I can't live with this—I don't expect you to understand."

L nodded. "I doubt that will be a problem, Kira," he said.

Yet it had been a problem. L had always been for the idea of rehabilitating criminals; he just knew that it didn't often work. But everyone, even Kira, after his confession and failure, deserved another chance.

And so, when L delivered Raito to the justice system, it was only on the condition that, if Raito willingly confessed, execution would not be an option. Raito was unaware of this plea bargain, and so when it came time to testify, he spoke calmly, his voice calm and detached, and told his entire, impossible story.

And he had remained calm all the way through the deliberation of prosecutors and witnesses, not even flinching when his own father took the stand, just sitting in his chair, a perfectly broken statue, staring straight ahead.

The testimonies of the task force, Raito's confession, L's accusation, and the voice recording L had made that day when Raito had given him the Death Note, were all more than enough to convict him.

And then the judge had delivered his sentence: a lifetime spent in an unnamed and hidden institute for the criminally insane. Which, as his testimony and behavior throughout the trial proved, he was. No visitors. No parole. No pardons.

Raito had screamed.

L flinches at that memory, feeling his stomach ache as he remembers how Raito had whipped around after that initial scream, and how he had found his eyes, even through the computer screen L was watching through.

Raito had struggled against his restraints, had fought his captors manically until they were forced to sedate him to transport him safely to his new, permanent home. L remembers how Raito's father had stared at his son that was no longer really his son, his expression pained even as he'd attempted to detach himself from the nightmare that was Kira.

It is something L is still trying to detach himself from.

For the next five years, L worked feverishly, solving more cases in that time than he had during his entire career so far. Watari watched, stunned, as L's genius seemed to reach new heights (when really he forced himself to think harder, be better, work longer), as he seemed to be able to go longer and longer without any sleep (when really, he began to hate sleep because when he slept there were nightmares), and as he had isolated himself from everyone, even Watari himself. They used to have conversations; L had even, from time to time, sought Watari's advice. Now their contact was limited and often not even face-to-face. Their communication was restricted to requests for information or food, and polite thank-you's.

Watari worried, but L was a grown man. He could decide for himself what he was going to do, how he was going to react. And if this was how L was going to cope with losing Raito, then Watari had no place to intervene.

It wouldn't have any effect anyway. L had always done what he pleased, and he had always coped with difficult situations by isolating himself socially. And by eating cake. Lots of cake.

And for five years this went on. L worked as hard as he could without making himself physically sick, trying and failing to forget his greatest challenge and his greatest failure, trying and failing to forget how Raito had made him *feel*, actually have emotion that wasn't simulated for others' comfort.

For years, L avoided making the call he knew that he'd have to make. And finally, with the completion of his hundredth case *that month*, Watari silently holds out a cell phone. L looks at it. The number is already dialed.

In an uncharacteristic gesture of irritation, L pushes the phone and Watari's hand away. "I have no time for such frivolous pursuits, Watari," L says, looking up at the older man from his crouch on the wooden floor.

"You have been staring off into the distance for an hour and a half, L," Watari answers, his voice so dry it chafes.

"Thinking," L points out.

"You solved your last case a few hours ago, and you have not requested another one."

"I can think of nothing besides cases?" L asks, keeping the irritation out of his voice with practiced ease. Just as Watari could detect it anyway, with practiced ease.

"No, not for a good while now." Watari holds the phone out again.

"I do not have any desire to call them, Watari," L says, his words almost snapping out.

"Yes, you do, and that is the problem," Watari answers. "L, you do not have to be afraid of this."

L is silent for a moment. "I am sorry, but it is not your business," he finally says. Watari notices that L doesn't contradict his previous statement.

"L, please," Watari says, and L looks up at him, making eye contact for the first time in . . . has it really been months? "If you cannot call them, then I will do it in your name. I know you want the information, and I admit that I, too, am concerned. They have not contacted us regarding details on his crimes or his behavior in over two years. Not even an update on therapy."

There is a long pause while L regards the phone distastefully. Finally, he takes it from Watari and holds it with two fingers, pressing call with his other hand. He looks away from Watari as he waits for the call to go through.

L tries to quell his anxiety as he listens to the other end of the call ring once, twice, three times. Then, a cool, professional female voice picks up.

"Crowley Institute. How may I help you?"

L directly calls the director's office, and he is actually surprised to hear that the man had a secretary. "Please connect me with Dr. Crowley," he says, his voice garbled from the program that disguised him.

"I'm afraid he's in a meeting."

"Tell him that L is calling. I am certain he will entertain my call for a few moments."

"Please hold." At least the secretary hadn't been chatty.

L sighs. He hates waiting, and tells Watari so with his eyes. He is surprised to see the old gentleman smiling, and then is sad that he should be surprised. It has been a while, L realizes, since he's interacted with Watari on a personal level.

L waits exactly 30 more seconds, and then the line clicks and another voice, soft and obviously male, speaks. "L," it says.

"Dr. Crowley," L answers. He nearly grinds his teeth in frustration. The last five years have spoiled him; he hasn't had any need of niceties at all.

"What can I do for you?"

L opens his mouth to say *I am calling to inquire of the condition of prisoner Yagami*, but what comes out instead is, "I am calling to inform you that I will be sending an envoy of mine to inspect prisoner Yagami's living and mental conditions."

"An envoy? Watari again?" Crowley asks, his voice smooth. L hates it; it was a lying voice. Like Raito's, but slicker.

"No, I will be sending someone new. You may call him Ryuuzaki. He will be arriving in three days' time. Is that acceptable to you?" What is he doing? Why did he say that? He doesn't want to go within 100 miles of the damned asylum they'd locked Raito in.

Crowley, having no knowledge of L's internal dilemma, doesn't miss a beat. "Certainly. Do you have a time of arrival?"

Again, L does not think before he speaks. This-going with the flow-is entirely new to him, and he is not certain he likes it. "Late afternoon or early evening. He will call with a more precise time later."

"Very well," Crowley says. "I look forward to his visit."

"Thank you," L says, and terminates their connection.

And sends the phone skidding across the wooden floor, until it collides with the opposite wall.

Watari immediately kneels beside to L. He does not touch him, but the offer, the thought, the reassurance, is there. L is thirty years old, after all, but he is still very much a child in many things that matter. Watari supposes that he always will be.

"Why did I just do that?" L wonders aloud, and although his voice is deadpan, it is only out of habit. In reality, his stomach is churning, and he can feel his chest tightening from long-buried anxiety and uncertainty.

"I am glad you did," Watari says. "Heaven knows that they could be lying to us about any number of Raito's conditions."

L stiffens, almost imperceptibly. "This will not change anything," he says.

"I know," Watari answers, then ventures into slightly more dangerous ground. "I think it may be good for you to see him."

L looks at Watari with large, inanimate eyes. "It will not change anything."

"Perhaps you can get some answers to the questions you have," Watari proposes, and is glad when L looks a little more alive upon hearing his suggestion.

L looks at him again, and his eyes are softer than they'd been in years. No one but Watari, and possibly Raito Yagami, would have noticed, but the hard, glassy sheen L has worn since Raito's trial has faded a bit. "Thank you, Watari," L says.

Watari nods. He is only doing his job in looking after L, anyway. (Though they both know it was more than that, it goes deeper than that, as L has never had any father that they know of, and Watari has never had children.) He stands, then crouches over once more and picks up the several pieces the cell phone has snapped into. L looks away, feeling slightly ashamed of himself and, more particularly, his outburst. It had been entirely unplanned.

Watari straightens, and pauses on his way out of the room next to L. He drops a hand onto L's head and strokes his hair, just once, before pulling his hand away. L does not react, but Watari knows that he doesn't mind. It perhaps even helps a bit with the pain he is feeling.

"He will be much changed, Lawliet," Watari says, almost whispers. It is a warning, though, not a reassurance, and L takes it as such.

"I understand. Thank you."

Watari leaves.

L continues staring blankly at the wall.

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A/N: Um. Hi. A full explanation of why I've been gone for . . . oh, months and months, is available on my profile. Suffice to say that I was grounded in the worst way, I'm very very sorry for leaving you all, and I'd rather no one yell at me. On the bright side, I'm taking this opportunity to edit all my stories, and I'm hoping to repost about a chapter a day or so—though I'm just starting university, so I make no promises.

Anyways, thanks in advance for being understanding! Once I've reposted everything, I'll start with the update on a fairly regular basis—at least one chapter a week in one of my stories. (Though Silence will be my priority, since I've finally figured out where it's going.)

I've missed everybody very much—oh, and if you have one story you'd like to see up sooner than the others, let me know and I'll see what I can do.

Thanks for reading! Send me any questions you've got.

## Chapter 2

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As he walks behind Crowley, L listens to the near-constant howling of the inmates. He hopes to God that Raito will not be like this—that Raito is stronger than the men he is imprisoned with— and L doesn't even believe in God.

Crowley is silent much of the way to Raito's cell, and when L isn't studying the cells of the other inmates, sometimes catching thin glimpses of madness and aggression in the rooms with windows, L studies the doctor.

He is a good-looking man in his late thirties. No, L remembers reading that he is at least 45. But he looks much younger than he really is, a trait L attributes to the doctor's wide blue eyes and clear, firm complexion. He has a thin, compact body, and L finds himself considering whether or not Crowley exercises daily because he enjoys it, or because he feels the need to look good. L entertains this question for exactly as long as it takes him to realize that he doesn't actually care, and then he drops it.

In reality, L is only analyzing the doctor to distract himself. He does not want to think about what he is about to do, and he cannot think about what he may see in a few minutes.

If there were any part of L, the L that disperses Justice with a capital 'J,' that felt guilt, it would be raging at his treatment of Raito Yagami. Of Kira. Because L knows that, despite his confession, despite his acceptance of his fate and of his guilt, and most certainly despite his confusing inability to kill either L or Watari, Raito deserves death. And the softer side of L—the one that believes that mercy must sometimes be considered alongside justice, or he would be just like Kira, the one that would hit Raito with a pillow and tell him to shut up and go back to sleep when Raito would wake up and bitch at L to shut the damn laptop—also knows that Raito should have been executed, because L had *promised* him.

But . . . and here, both L's begin to squirm, L didn't *want* to. The more logical part of him informed him that it was because Raito didn't *deserve* death, that execution was too good for him. And the other part of L, the much quieter one, had saved Raito from the death penalty, because he had seen Raito when he was not Kira, and he remembered.

And he believed that Raito was not past saving.

L almost growls, remembering this. Damn sentimentalities . . . but death was so permanent. There was no closure in death, only tragedy.

L believes both these reasons, the sensible and the emotive.

Well, now he was about to see the results of his actions. He had avoided this for five years, ever since he had heard that piercing, keening scream as Raito spun around to face the detective's laptop, to stare at the 'L' insignia on the glowing screen. The hatred L had seen in the boy's eyes, and the madness, besides, had been unnerving and . . . terrifying.

L feels his shoulders tighten, and he lets them. He needs to do this. He has needed to do this for years, and he is not sure whether it is for Raito's sake or his own.

L knows, of course, that his reaction to Raito's confession, trial, and sentence, is irrational. He knows that he has no right to despair over the loss of Raito, when it was he himself who'd demanded that Raito leave. But it had been one of L's rare, sincere moments when he'd told Raito that he was L's first friend. And, like it or not, L had been touched that Raito had seemed unable to write his name in the Death Note. *His name*, when it was theoretically the only one standing between Raito and absolute dominance of this world.

Logically, L was upset that Raito was gone because there was still much left unsaid and unsolved. Raito had revealed all when he'd taken the stand in the trial—all but why he had confessed. The prosecutor had asked him numerous times, but he'd remained silent, despite threats of being held in contempt. He'd been expecting death, of course, coming very soon, so why shouldn't he be obstinate?

Suddenly, Dr. Crowley stops in front of an unmarked door with no windows. He palms the locking mechanism, and L listens to the door click and unlock. Crowley pulls an ordinary key ring out of his pocket and selects a brass key, then inserts it into the lock and turns. L is feeling more anxious than he can remember, and he shoves the emotion deep inside his chest.

Crowley doesn't open the door, though; instead, he turns to L.

"There is one bit of information you ought to know before you speak to him," he says, and L feels like grinding his teeth.

"What is it?" he asks, trying not to snap.

"Light Yagami does not speak," Crowley informs him, and L cocks his head to one side.

"Beg pardon?" he inquires politely, wondering if the doctor is speaking in metaphors.

"He doesn't talk," Crowley repeats. "He has made no use out of his vocal chords in over two years, save when he screams in his nightmares."

"Does that happen often?" L asks, his brain still processing the other bit of information.

"A few times a week," the doctor says, shrugging to show just how little importance he places on these dreams. "He is sedated, so it doesn't disturb his sleep pattern."

"I see," L says. "And why was L not informed of this development?"

"We were unsure of how to go about it," Crowley says, and his voice does indeed display uncertainty. His face is sheepish. "We could find no reason for his abrupt refusal to speak, and we wanted to wait until we'd found something more conclusive."

L thinks it's a lie, he knows it's a lie, but he doesn't say anything. If he believes it is a serious issue after speaking to Raito, he will let the doctor know. For now, he needs to accomplish what he came here for. So he just nods, and does not miss the fact that the doctor's shoulders relax as he pulls the door open.

Crowley allows L to enter the room, then shuts and locks the door after him. They've already discussed how L will palm the lock on the inside of the room when he wishes to leave.

L stands in the small cell, wide eyes taking in every part of it—the toilet, sink, and tiny shower in the corner, how the walls are unpainted but how they seem to have been scratched and marked with God-knew-what (*blood*, L thinks) in a few places, how it smells like humans, not an unpleasant smell, but a pressing one—before he allows his eyes to shift to the small, uncomfortable cot in another corner of the room.

Raito Yagami is sitting on his bed, legs curled into a cross-legged position, and he has not yet looked up. L takes this time to study Raito without being examined himself; the boy—no, man, now—is gaunt and tense, and he is purposefully not looking towards the entryway.

His hair is longer now, and L can see that he is hiding his eyes under his bangs; his hands are twisting together as his eyes study them; the bright, fluorescent lights make him look sickly and pallid and very sad, though L supposes that he might be that anyways. His frame, thin and bony now, is trembling slightly, and his lips are white—his teeth are worrying at his bottom lip, but even this irritation is not enough to bring color back.

As L watches, Raito's tongue darts out and wets his lips before his teeth resume biting hard enough to draw blood, and L wonders just who Raito thinks L is, to be behaving like this.

Or if this is how he behaves, regardless.

L is surprised to see that his hands are bound together, with chains that allow him to move his wrists apart six or seven inches. They are close together now, but L can faintly see pink scars and even a few scabs that mean that he must try to test the limits of the handcuffs on a fairly regular basis.

Raito doesn't appear to have any interest in looking up; his face is impassive, his shoulders tight together, and the only part of him that is not moving are his eyes, which L still cannot see clearly.

He wants to see those eyes, which could never quite suppress every emotion Raito felt, try as he might. L wants to see Raito's eyes, not Kira's, and so finally, L speaks.

"Raito-kun's therapist tells me that he has developed an obstinate habit of not speaking," is what L says, and he is almost happy when Raito's head snaps up, and his hands still and he just stares at L.

His eyes, blank as they are, still hold a small spark of disbelief. In all the reports Crowley sent him, L never read that Raito had hallucinations, but that was two years ago, and he may be different now.

"I am not a hallucination, Raito-kun," L says gently. Raito nods numbly—he knows.

Good. At least he is responding with nonverbal indicators. This is still not enough for L. He did not travel thousands of miles, he did not, against his better judgement, go against Raito's sentence and do something that caused him—is still causing him—great anxiety and fear, for Raito to be stubbornly silent and unresponsive.

L walks towards him, and Raito's eyes, which look almost large in his too-thin face, follow his every movement, flinching when he gets too close. L stops at the sudden movement, and stares back at Raito. Up close, L can see nearly faded bruises on Raito's cheeks, and under his chin, on his throat. His hands are riddled with scars that appear to be nail marks, and his bare feet are red from the cold. These are only small physical indicators of the pain that L can read clearly on Raito's face.

"Raito-kun has not spoken for two years," L says. It isn't a question, but Raito nods again anyway. He is still biting his lip, though his hands have ceased their activity. His eyes are glazed, wide, but L has always been able to read Raito better than anyone else, and he knows: Raito is afraid.

"Raito-kun will speak to me," L says. His words are a command, and Raito stiffens when he hears them.

They stare at each other for so long that L loses track of when they began. Raito's eyes begin to make no sense to L, much as saying the same word over and over again makes it meaningless, but L refuses to look away.

And so it is Raito who lowers his eyes first, hiding them beneath his too-long hair. And he says, "Yes."

His voice is raw, hoarse. It sounds like tires on gravel, and L has to strain to hear it, even in the oppressive silence of Raito's room.

L takes another step towards him, asks the first question that comes into his mind. "Why has Raito-kun refused to speak?"

Raito's response takes L by surprise. He begins to laugh, and it is much like the laughter L heard on their last day together. This laugh, though, has no real sound; it has only the vague semblance of a laugh, it is mostly just gasping air and hoarse noises.

L knows it is laughter anyway, and he is chilled by it.

Raito stops as he rolls his head back to look at L again, hints of an unbalanced smile still hanging around his lips. He is breathing hard as he says, "What are you doing here, L?"

L doesn't know, and so he doesn't intend to answer. "I believe I asked Raito-kun a question," he says instead, and Raito's smile widens. L wants to hit him, to knock the smile off his face, so he can just see Raito and not his madness, but he restrains himself and listens to Raito's answer.

"They couldn't answer me," he murmurs, his voice gaining strength as he uses it more. "They couldn't answer me and I couldn't answer me, so I stopped until I got an answer."

"Do you have one now?" L asks.

Raito laughs briefly. L represses a shiver. "No," he says.

"Then why are you speaking?"

He laughs again, though L is not sure he ever really stopped to begin with. "You said," he answers. "You won, and you said."

L understands, vague as Raito's answer is. "And what is this question Raito-kun cannot answer?"

Raito leans forward, as though imparting a secret, and L leans too, until his face is only a foot away from Raito's. Raito stares at him for a moment, the insane smile gone from his face as he whispers, "What am I?" and then pulls back so his head hits and bounces against the wall once before he rests it there, still staring at L.

L processes this answer, or, rather, this question. "What does Raito-kun mean?" he asks.

"I lost," Raito says, his voice a grating whisper. "So I cannot be what I was. But I played in the first place, I almost won the in first place, so I have to be more than I am. More than what they say I am."

"What do they say you are?" L asks.

"Murderer," Raito whispers tenderly, tasting the word, speaking poison. "Animal. Less than human."

"Raito-kun is a murderer," L says impassively.

Raito looks away.

"But," L continues. "He is not an animal." Raito looks back, and it is not exactly hope in his eyes. Something close, perhaps, but guarded.

"He is not a god, either," L says, correctly guessing what Raito had first assumed himself to be.

"What am I, then?" Raito asks, and L can tell that he needs this and probably needs to hear it from L.

"Human," L says, and Raito flinches. "Very human. Very intelligent, very corrupted, disillusioned, brilliant. But human through it all."

Raito doesn't speak, but he leans down, wrapping his arms around himself and shivering.

As the back of his neck is exposed, L can see a thin scar running down from the base of his skull down under his standard-issue grey shirt.

He touches it with fingers that are barely there, and Raito's reaction is violent; he jerks away and pushes himself back against the wall, pulling his knees to his chest and wrapping his arms around them, holding them there. He doesn't speak and just stares at L with frightened eyes.

"What is that scar from?" L asks, putting both his hands into his pockets.

Slowly, Raito's skeleton fingers loosen and he lets his arms fall to his sides on the bed. "A surgical blade," he says, his voice deliberate and cold.

"Why?" L asks.

"It was too difficult to give me my sedatives intravenously, and I refused to take them orally, so they put an electrical device at the base of my skull," Raito explains. "They can just press a little button, then it's sleep for me." He is beginning to smile again, and L feels his stomach twist. Stimulation charges were highly illegal and quite dangerous, especially when experimental.

"Have you suffered from any harsh treatment at their hands?" L asks.

Raito stares at him, then lets his head roll back, so he is facing the wall. His eyes slide over to look at L again, and he begins to chuckle. "Why are you here, L?" he asks again. "Did you come to check up on me? To make sure my living conditions were acceptable?"

He pauses to laugh harder than ever at his questions, but before L can reply, he continues. "Do you really expect me to believe that? When I begged you for death, when I gave up all my pride to you and asked you, on my fucking knees for death, and you denied me that?" His voice has risen to a harsh and raspy shout and he tries to continue, but breaks off instead, laughing too hard to speak.

L leans forward and grasps his shoulders. "Raito, stop it," he says, his voice a touch sharper than normal. Raito pushes his hands away and leans forward, breathing hard. L stands straight again and watches impassively as Raito struggles to control himself.

"Bastard," Raito breathes, his hands clutching the thin blanket on his bed. "Why?" The word becomes a game and Raito whispers it over and over as L, still reeling from his outburst, tries to grab at passing thoughts and put them in order.

"Why why why why why why why why whywhywhywhy—"

"I believed that there was a chance Raito-kun could come to his senses with treatment," L interrupts, snatching the first coherent thought and running with it. "I have always believed in redemption," Even though his voice is bland, inside he is shaking.

Raito is trembling. "Liar," he hisses, still not raising his head. The rest of his body has fallen and now he is lying on the bed, curled in on himself.

"I am not lying, Raito-kun."

"You are always lying, L. It's what you and I do. It's all we know how to do," Raito announces.

"I am not lying, but that is not the only reason I disallowed the death penalty," L admits, and Raito slowly rotates his head so that his eyes meet L's. His hands are straining against his handcuffs as he is apparently trying to tear his blanket in two.

"Why?" he demands, breathes one last time.

"Raito-kun was still a mystery to me," L says, speaking easily, as though telling the truth about this isn't killing him. "Why he turned himself in, why he couldn't simply write my name are questions that I needed to know the answers to."

The edges of Raito's lips curl upwards and he turns and buries his face into the mattress. "You kept me alive, because you were *curious*," he says, his voice muffled as he begins to laugh breathlessly.

"Why is Raito-kun constantly laughing?" L finally inquires, feeling sick from this insane laughter spinning around him.

"Because everything's so damn *funny*," Raito says, as though that explains anything at all. His laughter becomes too much for him as he tries to explain further, and L is afraid that he's going to shake his frail self apart as he trembles violently on the thin cot. Once again, L steps forward, this time kneeling on the cot as he pulls Raito into a half-sitting position, and shakes him a bit.

"Stop it," he demands, and Raito gasps. His laughter eventually calms until he is only chuckling a little, still grinning at L.

"You want to know why I couldn't write your name, *L Lawliet*?" he asks, and for a moment, just a brief second as Raito says L's name, L can see Kira flash through Raito's eyes, angry and hateful and insane in a completely different way that how Raito is now. "Why I couldn't be Kira anymore?"

L only nods, still gripping Raito's shoulders, afraid that, without his touch, Raito will slump over again and laugh and laugh until he is nothing but a raspy voice and bones.

*Shinigami*, his mind supplies, without his permission. *He sounds an awful lot like—*

Raito is still smiling as he leans forward and presses his lips to L's; he applies a little pressure then pulls away from the chaste kiss as quickly as he'd begun.

L stares, for once unable to force his brain into action. His fingers are gripping Raito's bony shoulders hard, his nails digging into the pale flesh.

"That's why," Raito whispers. "Because gods don't fall the way I did. They don't want things the way I did. I wasn't a god, and if I wasn't a god, then I couldn't be Kira. Kira was still right. He is still right, and he always will be. *But I am not him.*"

"And for that, you deserved death?" L whispers back.

"For wanting something I couldn't have," Raito answers, and all at once, he seems too real, too sane, staring at L intensely from only inches away. "For pretending to be something I never could be."

L stares into those golden eyes—and they're familiar enough to be heartbreaking and different enough to be terrifying. He cannot look away, he can't even release Raito's shoulders. He is frozen, and suddenly struck by the desire to help Raito. "I believe you have been suffering for that for five years now," he finally whispers.

Raito laughs, but it is short-lived and more bitter than insane. "Oh yes," he whispers back, and L feels chills race down his spine. "It would be enough to have to feel my failure every day, to feel despair around my throat and sitting on my chest, making every breath hard, but my punishment has gone far deeper than that."

L takes Raito's face in one of his hands, leaving the other on Raito's shoulder, and Raito doesn't resist, doesn't break eye contact. "Raito-kun," he murmurs, "I want you to tell me everything you can remember or say about this punishment of yours."

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A/N: This is still one of my absolute favorite chapters I've ever written. Possibly THE favorite. Not to say I'm like the god of fanfiction, but I just love me some crazy!Raito. Good times, you guys, good times.

Oh, and I absolutely HAVE to thank everyone for being so incredibly nice and supportive and just freaking awesome. I love you all, and I'm going to make up this wasted summer to you some time! I really, really appreciate it, and I actually can't express how great it makes me feel when I realize that people actually do care about me and my stories. So. Awesome. You all rock.

P.S. If anyone has Ignorance saved, I'd love it if you could drop me a line. It's the only one of my stories I'm still trying to recover!

Thanks for reading! Please review if you enjoyed it--or if you have some pointers!

## \*Chapter 3\*: MultiVariable

### Chapter 03

Edited and Reposted as of 8.29.09 (y'know, those periods were supposed to be backslashes but I rather like the alternative punctuation. I do believe I'll keep it.)

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Matt slams the door on his way in, partly to announce his arrival, and partly just because he can.

As he moves into the front room, he cringes slightly at the sight he is met with; it's not the piles of video games, once stacked in the corner, now toppled over and strewn randomly, it's not the fact that some of his most prized possessions, his game consoles, are half-buried under files and folders and papers from past cases, and it certainly isn't the silver and gold chocolate wrappers that give the room a sort of debauched elegance.

It is Mello, sitting on the faded navy couch, watching a set of monitors placed close together, all showing roughly the same image from different angles, his feet propped up on the table, and a pronounced scowl on his face.

Matt cringes for two reasons; first, Mello's expression is beyond irritated, and Matt knows that it is at least partially his fault for being a good three hours late with the hack codes he practically had to wrestle from one of his contacts; second, because Mello is distinctly . . . chocolate-less.

Which means that there is there is no chocolate left in the house. Which means that Mello is waiting for *Matt* to bring him some of his much-needed fix.

And Matt did not purchase any chocolate on his way back from the contact's place.

He knows where some is stashed, of course; when he thinks about this, he's actually a bit concerned that, even though they are both legally adults, he still has to hide chocolate from Mello in case of emergencies. But he will only bring it out if it is an emergency; again, this creates a problem, since he's pretty sure Mello is not beneath calling 911 in search of chocolate.

Matt often thinks how strange it is that neither of them have really changed since they were kids. Sure, Mello's gotten harder, but Matt has too—doesn't everybody when they grow up?

Essentially, though, they have kept their addictions, they have kept their friendship (the only one either of them has), they have kept their passions and coping mechanisms and strange behaviors. They are children in adults' bodies, playing at adults' games. Matt thinks that this was actually probably the idea when they were being taught and trained at Wammy's. After all, from what he knows of L, whom they are supposed to be embodying or replacing or what the fuck ever, L's pretty much a child too.

Sometimes, Matt feels surrounded. But he knows it isn't fair to feel this way, not when he himself dives into games and other distractions first chance he gets.

Now, he pulls a PSP out of his pocket and sprawls out carelessly onto the couch a few feet away. He knows that this will announce his presence to Mello without being, as Mello puts it, 'clingy.'

Matt isn't sure why saying hello and asking what's up is considered *clingy*, but he supposes that he isn't really surprised. Mello has a thing about emotional attachments.

He flicks the on button and turns the volume down low, since he knows that Mello does not need anything else to irritate him right now (normally, Matt doesn't give a damn, they were his games, he doesn't ask Mello to shut up about chomping on his fucking chocolate, but this seems like an especially bad time), and he plays.

Sort of.

In reality, Matt is just waiting for Mello to acknowledge him, since he knows that trying to get Mello's attention before he's ready to talk has been fatal to others in the past, and while Matt is *usually* safe when it comes to actually being hurt by Mello, on the rare occasion it has been known to happen.

Like three months ago, when Near called Matt to ask for his help hacking a network in the U.S. so he could get on with his current case.

Matt didn't really think about it; he'd hacked the FBI more times than he could count, starting when he'd been about 11, and Near's location was pretty close, so he headed over there.

It took him about an hour to reach where Near was, a good twenty minutes to get in and get Near where he needed to be, then he'd headed home and stopped for takeout on the way.

All in all, he'd been gone for about three hours. Not unusual for him, though he did usually tell Mello when and where he was going.

When Matt got back to their base, the apartment was nearly pitch black, with only one tiny light on in the kitchen. He yelled for Mello, but when he didn't get an answer, he headed towards the light.

He stopped in front of the table and set down the food, but before he could turn around and yell for Mello again, he felt cool metal press into the back of his neck.

"Hey, Mello," he said, his voice flat, thinking that it was a game, used to feeling guns and knives close to his skin after a couple of years of living with Mello, of sleeping with Mello.

"Didn't think to check and see if something was wrong with the place with all the lights off?" Mello asked, and Matt frowned. This was wrong—it felt all wrong.

Matt tried to diffuse the situation with common sense. "I figured if something was wrong I'd have gotten the emergency signal on my phone." He tried to shrug but the gun was pressed harder, and then Matt started to get it. *Not a game*, his brain filled in. *Real. He's really angry.*

*Why thank you, brain*, Matt snipped. *I got that. You couldn't have filled me in earlier?*

*Pay attention, dumbass*, his brain shot back. *You're gonna get yourself killed.*

"I didn't think it was a big deal, Mel," he said, wincing as the gun dug deeper in response to the pet name. "I thought maybe our op was trying to conserve energy, save the planet. Go green."

"Shut up," Mello snarled. He did not sound amused.

"Where were you?" Mello asked, when Matt didn't say anything.

Mello was serious, he was pissed and he while he wouldn't actually kill him, there was no guarantee at all that he wouldn't shoot him somewhere damaging or painful. Or both. He'd done it before, after all, when he'd found out that Matt was using stuff other than cigarettes.

Right then, Matt could have used some cocaine, but he tried not to let the thought really take hold in his brain. He'd been off the stuff for years; he couldn't afford to start fantasizing now.

The truth was the best, Matt decided, since if he lied and Mello found out about it, some major shit would go down.

He cleared his dry throat. "Near called," he said, making sure that his voice sounded flat and ordinary. This might not be a game per se, but Matt still knew that showing any emotion in front of Mello when he was like this was perceived as a weakness. And Mello had no tolerance for weakness.

"And?"

"And he wanted help hacking the FBI network. I had to do it from their computer, since the source wouldn't have transferred over."

"So you helped him?"

"Yes?" Matt had really wished that that had sounded less like a question.

There was a long, hard pause where Mello pressed the gun into Matt's neck hard enough to bruise. Then, finally, the cold, prickling sensation went away as the gun moved. Matt didn't sigh in relief, partly because when it was there, at least he *knew* where it was aiming, and partly because he figured that wasn't the end of it.

He was right.

The next thing Matt felt was a sharp, shooting pain behind his right ear, and then everything got very dark.

When he woke up, Matt felt the bruise from the butt of Mello's pistol before he did anything else, assessing damage as he'd learned to do. It was sizeable, but he likely didn't have a concussion. He was on the floor, in front of the table, and he winced and stood up. The apartment was just as dark as before but at least Mello hadn't trashed the place. Sometimes if he was pissed enough, total destruction was the only way to go.

Matt sighed and went looking for him. Mello was in the bedroom, eyes flicking over case notes. He looked up when Matt walked into the room: a good sign.

Matt knew he shouldn't, but still he took perverse pleasure in the fact that he could read Mello like this; that he could read him enough to know how many inches he could move closer, or how many syllables will be enough to set him off. No one else could claim Mello the way Matt could.

Matt stood in the doorway, waiting silently.

Mello stared at him for a moment.

Finally, "Come in," Mello said.

And they never mentioned it again. As usual. Remembering this, Matt also remembers that he *knows* Mello, that he loves him, and he's not ashamed of it. Yes, Mello is unnecessarily violent and Matt would rather not put up with all his crap. But Matt's never met anyone he's liked better or wanted to be with more.

And what's more—Matt remembers how Mello used to be. He doesn't know exactly what happened in the years after Mello ran away from Wammy's. Mello won't tell him. But he's seen the scars and he's heard the screams when Mello dreams, so Matt is willing to overlook his behavior due to . . . extenuating circumstances.

Inducting oneself into the Mafia without a recommendation, family member, or any other experience is not an easy task. Especially when Mello had been as young and pretty as he was.

Now, though, with the current scenario, Matt doesn't think he's in any real danger. Mello is pissed, sure, but that's an almost perpetual state of existence for him.

Still Matt doesn't speak; sometimes he wonders why he stays, why he puts up with this shit, then remembers how brilliantly Mello shines when he's leading, or how crystal clear his blue eyes look when he's explaining the next, undoubtedly dangerous, plan to catch their criminal, or how his expression will sometimes lose its hard sheen when he thinks Matt is asleep and his fingertips run through his hair.

That's why. Because Matt is the only one who ever gets to see Mello like this, and even if he didn't, he would still stay, because being with Mello is the only addiction he's ever really needed.

Mello looks up from the surveillance cameras he's been observing for the past few hours, and Matt notices but keeps playing. He knows that he has to pretend that he doesn't care what Mello is doing, even if he would love to stare at him at all hours of the day, until Mello speaks to him.

Which he does.

"Matt," he says.

Matt doesn't look up, but he says, "Yeah?"

"You have the codes?"

"Yep."

"Give 'em here."

Matt pauses the game and reaches into his coat pocket, pulling out a pack of cigarettes and a thumb drive. He passes the latter to Mello, who examines it and then inserts it into the USB drive.

Matt decides to speak, decides that it can't hurt. "You want me to run 'em?" he asks, lighting the cigarette and inhaling deeply. He waits for Mello's answer, which is to silently pass Matt the laptop he's holding, before Matt exhales.

Years ago, this sort of thing would have posed a problem for Matt; now, he runs the codes effortlessly and in just under thirty minutes he's in ICPO's main database with unrestricted access.

He passes the laptop back to Mello, who takes it, fiddles with the database for a few minutes, and then promptly places it on the floor. Mello fixes him with a look, and Matt knows full well what's wrong.

"Chocolate," Mello says.

Matt stands. Time to get some of the hidden stuff out. Mello has not yet adjusted to Matt sitting next to him, and Matt hasn't even tried to move closer. Not to mention the fact that Mello's voice is still deadly calm, even as he stares at Matt with cold eyes.

Matt brings the chocolate back from their bedroom and hands it to Mello, sitting down about a foot closer to him than when he left. Mello tears into his chocolate and eats about half the bar in the time it takes Matt to restart his PSP.

Mello finishes and holds out his hand for another one, which of course Matt has, and which of course Matt gives him.

Mello eats this one slower; he's doing better with the chocolate and the access to ICPO and, frankly, with Matt sitting a little closer.

As he's eating, licking the chocolate, savoring the taste, Mello regards Matt with his head tilted, examining him with wide blue eyes. Suddenly, he leans forwards and plucks the half-gone cigarette from Matt's lips. Matt raises his own eyes to meet Mello's for the first time that day.

"What the hell took you so long?" Mello demands, examining the cigarette between his fingers.

Matt shrugs. "Control didn't want to give me the codes."

"Did you threaten him?"

"Oh, you know me. Threats galore. I borrowed that one you used last week, with the breaking off of their teeth and using the shards to add crunch to my salad. Those little pine-nuts just don't do it for me."

"Was that me who said that?"

"Mm-hmm. I hope you don't mind I used it."

"Not at all."

Matt smiles and leans back, relaxing onto the couch. He eyes his cigarette. Mello has asked him to just go through a pack a day—something absurd about him dying of lung cancer—and Matt has grudgingly complied. However, this does mean that every cig counts, and his is currently in danger of burning out.

"Can I have that back?" he asks.

Mello glances down at it. "How come you smoke?" he asks, and Matt shifts uncomfortably. They haven't had this conversation before—thank God—but now it looks like Mello's natural curiosity is winning out over any respect he has for Matt's privacy.

"Let me answer your question with another question," Matt proposes. Mello looks as though he's in the mood to humor him, so Matt continues. "Have you ever, in the history of considering your name and all its glorious possibilities, thought about saying, 'Mello out' every time you leave the room?"

Mello stares.

"Y'know," Matt explains, "like, 'Mello out, dude,' only, for you, it's like, 'Okay, I'm out.' And—and you could combine them and—"

Mello calmly reaches forward and shoves him off the couch, then promptly grinds the cigarette under his heel. Into the carpet.

"Aw man," Matt complains. "That was the last one."

"You deserve that and more," Mello informs him. "'Mello out,' indeed. . ."

Matt grins up at him. He hasn't moved from where he's fallen on the floor.

"And your sorry attempt at distracting me from my question has not succeeded, bitch," Mello continues. "I still wanna know why you think that poisoning yourself from the inside out is a spectacular idea."

Matt sits up. Shrugs. "I dunno," he says, a bit sullenly. "Seemed like a good idea at the time."

"And now you're addicted?" Mello guesses.

Matt shrugs again. "I guess," he agrees.

"But why'd you start in the first place, Matt?"

"Something to do," Matt mutters, looking at the forlorn remnants of his cigarette on the carpet. Which of course explains nothing at all. But he doesn't want to tell Mello that he started when Mello left Wammy's without him, because he'd needed something to do with his mouth or it would inevitably turn into a frown. Because he'd needed the smoke clogging his lungs and stilling his nerves or he'd feel cool tears on his cheeks without even noticing that he'd started crying. He'd been young then, but he's still not sure if he wouldn't still react the same way if Mello chose to leave him again.

Mello leans down, across the couch. "I'll give you something to do," he purrs, and eases his lips over Matt's.

Matt grins into the kiss; he knows that it ruins the effect, but he can't help it. He's just got a cheerful disposition. Besides, he knows very well that this is Mello's way of letting him off the hook.

Slow, hot kisses slide between them as Mello slides down off the couch, graceful as a jungle cat (and twice as deadly) to straddle his hips.

Their joined mouths taste sweet from Mello's chocolate and bitter from Matt's nicotine, and Matt doesn't think that he's ever tasted anything better. He doesn't think he wants to try to find anything better. Mello is enough—much more than enough—for him.

He reaches up and threads fingers through Mello's pale hair, leaning forward to place wet, delicate kisses along his neck. Mello groans and pauses, short of breath for a moment, and then continues to pull his gloves off with his teeth, which sends a jolt straight down to Matt's lower abdomen.

His bare hands move down and under Matt's shirt, grazing fingers across pale, sensitive skin and raking nails down ribs and the trail of hair that leads him lower.

And then Matt's phone rings.

Matt pulls away with an, "Aw, shit," and flounders for a moment before pulling his phone out from under the couch, halfway wrapped in candy bar foil.

"Really," Mello murmurs in his ear, nipping at it. "You're really gonna get that?" His voice is warm and pitched low and for a long moment Matt can't find the will power to open his phone.

Suddenly he shakes his head, then nods it. "Yeah, you know only people from Wammy's have my number." And he presses the talk button.

"H'lo?" he inquires.

"Matt?" Matt has never heard this voice before—it reminds him greatly of Near's flat tone, but it is much deeper and softer than the young teen's.

"Depends," Matt says, then nearly curses as he feels Mello's tongue on his neck, running down to the hollow of his collarbone. He does flinch and can feel Mello's mischievous grin against his throat.

"This is L," the voice says, and both Mello and Matt freeze for a moment, as they can both hear what is being said on the phone. Then Mello bites the hollow in Matt's throat and Matt stifles a yelp.

He can't push Mello off of him, since that may or may not result in Mello's picking back up his line of questioning, so he endures Mello's sweet tongue and cruel teeth on his throat as he answers.

"Prove it," he says.

"Does a knowledge of your real name, Mail Jeevas, count towards anything?" the voice—maybe L—asks.

"Probably," Matt admits.

"And Mello, Mihael Keehl—he is with you?" L asks.

Matt grimaces at Mello, asking him silently if he should answer in the affirmative. Mello hesitates, then nods.

"Yeah," Matt says.

Mello is too curious about the conversation to continue actively tormenting Matt, so he just sits where he is, straddling Matt's hips, thighs pressed hard and close as he listens.

"I require your assistance," L says, and Matt makes a noise of surprise. "Yours and Mello's, if possible."

Matt looks at Mello again. He knows what he would say if it were his decision, but he also knows that speaking without Mello's permission is pretty freakin' stupid if he wants to get any tonight. And yes, in case you were wondering, he does. Mello holds a hand out imperiously for the phone, which Matt hands over to him without a second thought.

"Hello, L?" Mello says, and Matt notices, with only the smallest twinge of jealousy, how Mello's tone softens when he speaks to L, and how his lips barely twitch in the semblance of a smile when L replies.

"Mello," L says.

"Do you want our help apprehending a criminal?" Mello asks.

"Actually, I would like you and Matt to assist me in breaking into a highly protected insane asylum and securing the escape of one of the prisoners."

Mello is actually silent, speechless. Matt is the first to recover and grabs the phone from Mello, forgetting in this moment of excitement. "Hell yes, I'm in," he says.

To his relief, Mello just grins, the crazy, reckless grin that makes armies of the underworld follow him, that makes Matt follow him, no matter where the hell they're going. He grabs the phone back and actually sticks a tongue out at Matt. "Me too, L."

"I am very pleased to hear of your enthusiasm," L said, and did, in fact, sound gratified and . . . relieved. How strange. It was unlikely that they would say no to anything L asked of them.

"Who is the inmate, and what is the asylum?" Mello asks. His eyes are glittering wickedly; Matt has always known that Mello loves working on the wrong side of the law to do the right thing.

"His name is Light Yagami, and he is a top security inmate at Crowley's Institute for the Criminally Insane," L informs them, and Mello frowns a little in recognition. He hands the phone to Matt and then bounds into the tiny room where they store old case files.

"Talk to me about the security, L," Matt says, lighting a new cigarette he's stashed in his pocket.

"The institute is surrounded by stone walls fifteen feet in height, topped with three feet of barbed wire. It is a simple padlock and key to enter both the exterior gates and the main doors of the facilities. Yagami is situated in a room in the second basement, right wing. His room has no windows. One door, which is palmed, then opened with an ordinary key."

"Cameras?" Matt can hear Mello rummaging around in the cramped space, cursing loudly when he hits his leg on a filing cabinet.

"Yes, many. No blind spots. You'd have to run a loop, Matt, to fool them."

"That's no problem." He has every right to be arrogant; he'd been fooling security cameras with the same trick for nine years now. Just loop a single sixty-second clip over and over, and the dumb night guards never know what hits them.

"Guards are armed?"

"Fatally," L confirms.

"Likely to use their weapons?"

"More likely to stun with tasers. Completely capable of killing, however."

"Nighttime escape?"

"I was under the impression that that would be simpler. Oh, and are you familiar at all with implanted stimulation charges?"

"Sure. Place a small chip capable of starting electrical charges at the base of the skull, and you can control reactions or even consciousness. Sort of like a shock collar, but less conspicuous and a hell of a lot more dangerous."

"Would you have any idea as to how to disable or remove one within three minutes?" L asks, sounding a bit concerned.

"Did a number on him, huh?" Matt comments. He chews the cigarette for a minute. "Yeah, I bet I could disable it temporarily, at least till we're out of their range. Removal without proper surgery's too risky. But with a sharp, concentrated charge, like from a taser, right to the box, I could switch it off. Course, it might also switch *him* off for a couple of hours. But it shouldn't cause any permanent damage."

"Then I would like to ask for your assistance in those things."

"Sounds fun."

"I thought you and Mello might enjoy it," L says, and he sounds as pleased as Matt's ever heard him.

Mello bounds into the room just then, jumping onto the couch and grabbing the phone. He has a large manila folder in one hand and references it as he speaks to L again. "You want us to help you break *Kira* out, L?" he demands.

There is a brief pause. "That is correct," L admits. "If you feel yourselves incapable of accomplishing this—"

"Fuck no," Mello says. "But I do kinda wanna know why."

Matt turns his head away as he smiles; Mello never realizes how he slips into childhood slang when he's especially excited.

"He is being mistreated and experimented upon in Crowley's Institute. Also, without his murder weapon, Light Yagami is . . . quite human," L finished, and Mello's slightly confused expression lifted into one of delight.

He doesn't say what he is thinking, and instead asks, "I get that you need Matt to shut down security and fool the cameras, but what do you need me for, L?"

L's voice sounds somewhat amused. "Actually, Mello, I was hoping that you would not be adverse to coming up with a convincing and consuming distraction. Does that interest you at all?"

Mello's grin puts the devils' angels to shame. "Yeah," he says, voice excited, "yeah, I could do that."

"Fine," L says, the word sounding pleased. "Are you currently still in southern Texas?"

"Yeah, and it's hot as hell here," Matt mutters, but L hears him, even though it's Mello who's holding the phone.

"Is there any reason you cannot meet me in Warsaw in a week?" L asks.

"Warsaw?" Mello muses this. They are in the middle of a case, but it is not especially interesting, and frankly, Mello would drop almost anything to help L. "Sure," he says finally. "We can do that."

"Very well," L says. "I will see you in a week, then. And—" he adds, just as they are about to hang up—"I must thank you for being so willing to assist me. I realize that I have not sufficiently explained myself."

"L, we trust you," Matt tells him, eager to get on with their previous activities. "Good-bye."

L terminates their conversation.

Matt looks at Mello, and realizes that both of them are grinning like devils. This was going to be *awesome*.

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L hang up and breathes a sigh of relief. Watari is looking at him curiously.

"I understand that Light's condition is somewhat serious, L," he says, "but does it really warrant such dramatic and . . . illegal action?"

L considers this. "I could, as you suggested earlier, go the legal circuit in securing Light Yagami's removal, but there are several problems, the first being that Light himself is not willing to testify. Secondly, he would just be placed in another asylum, and since I myself selected Crowley's as a place least likely to abuse their authority, I no longer place much trust in these sorts of institutes. Lastly, and most importantly, going through the law would take years, possibly even over a decade. I fear that, if he stays in that place, Light doesn't even have *months* before he loses his mind entirely."

Watari nods. "That does make perfect sense," he concedes. "I am glad you decided to check on his well-being."

L nods, turning back to his laptop. "As am I, Watari." Watari smiles, noticing that, even though L's face is creased slightly with worry, the glazed look his eyes have held is gone completely, and he now looks engaged in his task, rather than bored and sad.

When Watari leaves, L presses the Play button on his laptop, listening once again to his conversation with Raito a few days ago.

"Raito-kun, I want you to tell me everything you can remember or say about this punishment of yours."

"Why do you care, L?"

"Raito-kun will tell me."

". . . Very well." Harsh, nearly suppressed laughter. "Where to start . . . where to start . . ."

"At the beginning, Raito-kun?"

"There's no beginning, L. Just all over the place." Breathing, thinking. "I don't remember what order it happened in, just that everything . . ."

Silence.

"Raito-kun is not making an extraordinary amount of sense."

"Fuck you. They . . . want to see what makes me go. I could have told them that." More laughter.

"Stop that, Light." L speaks in English, hoping the language transition will shock him.

It does and he is silent, then speaks in English as well. "It's pride, that's what makes me run," is what he eventually says. "They wanted to see how far they could stretch it. Stretch me."

L's heart feels like it weighs twenty pounds and just sunk into the depths of his stomach. "Interesting proposal," he manages weakly.

The rustling sound of sheets being twisted and a clinking that signifies chains being stretched. "You would think so."

"And they did what?"

Long pause. Silence. Then, whispered, "Hurt. Me."

There only the sound of breathing.

"All sorts of things. Put in this stimulation charge chip. Whatever you want to call it." Words coming very fast, very disjointed now. "Heated metal on my skin, strange operations, leaving me chained for hours in the same position. Seeing how long I'd last before I begged." A harsh, drawn breath. Raito's. "Seeing how sleep deprivation would affect—keeping me awake for so so long. Oh, God—" Raito's voice, cracking.

He stops there, but the voice he's using tells L that he isn't finished. "Is that all you can remember, Raito-kun?"

Laughter, harsh, louder, ringing in the tiny space. "That's not enough for you? You want to hear I was in more pain?"

"If you remember more."

Harsh voice. "I don't."

Silence for one minute.

Two.

Ten.

Then, L's voice. "I will be going, then, Raito-kun."

The loudest silence yet. Raito's voice, low. "I see."

"I will return."

"I see."

Footsteps on cool concrete. The barely discernible sounds of his cot creaking and breathless laughter.

Clicking, a door's locks opening. Laughter louder, harsher, more sound.

"I will come back, Raito-kun."

"I . . . understand . . . Ryuzaki." Gasp between laughs.

More clicking. Footsteps. Door slamming shut.

Crowley's voice. "Was your stay informative?"

L's voice, layered with the same lies as the doctor's. "Very."

End of tape.

A/N: Well, I'm much happier with this chapter than when I first posted it—it has the most changes so far, though possibly no one but me knows it. Just rest assured that it is much much better.

Well, I'm pretty beat. I'll post another chapter of this probably tomorrow, and probably I'll post my one-shot Solitude. It's undergoing some major construction, but hopefully it'll be out today or tomorrow as well.

Thanks so much for reading! If you have any comments or concerns, please fill out complimentary customer survey below.

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## \*Chapter 4\*: Velocity

### Chapter 4

Edited and reposted as of 9.1.09

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It was pitch black, and nothing could be seen of the little room where Light Yagami lay, strapped to a cool metal table. Suddenly, the lights blazed to life, and Raito gave a muffled cry of pain, even as he tried to stop himself. His tearing, white-blind eyes searched around the room, trying to see where he was and who was with him. Finally, blurred eyes rested on the dark figure of Dr. Mathias Crowley, who was standing with one hand still over the light switch.

"Light," he greeted formally as he noticed his patient looking at him.

Raito's brain quickly made the transition to English as he struggled to work past the haze of no food and solitary darkness that he'd been subjected to for the past several days. His throat was burning with thirst, and he could barely push words out of his cracked lips. "Doctor," he finally managed, his voice little more than a strained croak.

The doctor took exactly one step closer to him. "How are you feeling, Light?" he asked.

Raito knew it was not an idle question. The doctor wanted to know, to record it for future studies. The question now was whether or not to give him what he wanted. "Fine," he whispered. Not, then.

Crowley took two more steps forward. "Light, you know that I need more scientific answers if I am to draw anything conclusive from this study." Raito was silent.

"If you refuse to explain how you are feeling, physically, emotionally, and mentally, then we will have to conduct the experiment a second time."

"Fuck you."

"That's a start. You feel anger, then?" Crowley took no notes; he didn't need to, as there were several cameras monitoring this exchange.

"Yes," the word tore out of Raito's throat, unwillingly. He did not care so much about the food, and his thirst was a pressing need that could be easily placated, but when they left him in the darkness for so long, without even a human voice to anchor him . . . things became eerie. And he became frightened.

"Very good. We'll start with emotions," Crowley said conversationally. "Since you seem inclined to discuss those first. What else do you feel?"

Raito closed his eyes, a scream of frustration building in his thin chest. The doctor was cold, too cold, even when he was searing his flesh with irons or twisting his wrist around to completely wrong angles, he was cold and lying. Raito spoke through clenched teeth as he answered. "Anger," he repeated, trying to make his own voice as clinical as possible. "Frustration. Fear."

The doctor smiled, and Raito was unable to stop himself from shivering. "Fear?" he repeated.

Raito was unable to nod, because of his recent surgery, so he just stared at Crowley. "Yes," he said, his voice braver than he felt.

"Why?"

Raito took a deep breath, ignoring how it burned his dry throat. "I don't know when I'll be able to eat," he tried.

Crowley's smile became sarcastic. "You are afraid we will starve you to death?" he asked dubiously.

"No . . ." Raito didn't finish, didn't want to speak of his fears.

Crowley took three steps forward. Now he was only a few feet away from where Raito lay, and Raito shrank back from him. "Then why does not being fed make you afraid?" he asked.

Raito stared at him with hard eyes. *You can't break me*, he thought at the doctor, and the thought was written all over his face. It was only months into his treatment, and already he could feel the edges of his brain beginning to fray, like ends of a rope that was used and abused too much, too often. But he was stronger than this doctor. He had killed thousands and it had not affected him. Simple hunger and thirst and darkness could not break him. "I am afraid because hunger is an unfamiliar sensation," he said, his voice cool despite cracking in several places.

"Ah, yes," Crowley said, nodding his head. "Fear of the unknown. That's quite common."

Raito hated these games, because they wore on his mind, but at the same time, he looked forward to them, because they were the only time he actively used his brain anymore. Outwit the doctor, talk about inconsequential matters so he can't see what Raito really fears. He could feign fear as easily as any other emotion.

"I suppose," he said noncommittally.

"What else?" Crowley asked. He took one more step forward, and Raito tensed further. The doctor wasn't pleased with how this conversation was progressing, regardless of how he smiled.

"I am afraid of hunger because it hurts," Raito said. There. That was true enough.

The doctor's eyes glinted as he took one, final step forward. "Fear of pain," he whispered. Raito's stomach contracted as tendrils of real fear began to coil around his insides. "That, too, is quite common."

Raito had no answer for him this time. He just watched warily, waiting for the hurt he knew was coming. He hadn't met the doctor's expectations this time; he rarely did.

Suddenly, the doctor's pale hand reached into his pocket and extracted what looked like a small remote control. "Do you remember your surgery, Light?" he asked. His voice was still calm and gentle.

"Yes," Raito said.

"Do you remember your sessions of electroshock therapy a few weeks ago?" Raito shivered. "Yes," he said.

The doctor's smile grew. "This is very much like that, what we placed at the base of your skull. It is simply more central."

Raito looked at him uncomprehendingly.

Crowley twisted a knob on the control he held. Raito felt nothing, and stared at the doctor, who smiled down at him. Crowley reached down and brushed some of Raito's too-long hair out of his eyes. Raito cringed at his touch. "I was merely adjusting the power level of the shock. It can't be too strong at first," he explained, then withdrew his hand and pressed a small red button on the control.

Raito screamed, arching his back involuntarily and twisting, trying to find some relief from the burning, shattering pain that was coursing down his spine, into his legs and all the way into his toes in waves. It was in his head too; his eyes were wide, unblinking but also unseeing as he struggled against his restraints. He was unable to form words, but if he could have, he would have been begging stop stop please oh god stop it!

Finally, Crowley pressed the grey button on the remote, and Raito instantly slumped against the metal examination table, completely spent. Every muscle screamed in pain from his twisting and from the electricity that had been sent through them in waves. Even his bones felt as though they'd been attacked with a sledgehammer, hitting every inch of his body over and over until he was shattered. He lay where he was, a thin line of drool unnoticed as he gasped in short, bloody breaths.

Crowley examined his physical reaction carefully. Dry sobs ripped out of his lungs now, but after the initial tears of pain, he did not cry. That was one, fascinating thing about Light Yagami. Except for the very first night he had spent here, he had not cried from emotional pain once. Dr. Crowley wanted to know what was enough to make him cry.

"Do you feel betrayed, Light?" Crowley asked, and almost giggled when Raito's body tensed. Even with his muscles screaming in pain, the boy couldn't stop being defensive for one moment while conscious. Raito didn't answer, but he wasn't really supposed to. Raito refused to look at him, so the doctor cupped a gentle hand around his jaw and turned his face. Raito let his head be turned, and when he met the doctor's eyes, his were blazing and fierce. Crowley laughed, and wiped away the line of spittle. Raito flinched away from his touch, but his eyes were no less angry as Crowley began stroking his face. "I suppose it must be very difficult for someone like you, who values control so greatly, to be so helpless."

Raito stared at him. "What are you?" he whispered, and the question took the doctor off guard.

"What do you mean, Light?"

"What are you, that you can torture patients entrusted to your care like this? Under whose authority do you act?" His voice was broken and rasping, and the doctor made a mental note to give him water soon.

"It interests me greatly that you should ask such questions. I think I will respond with questions of my own." The doctor paused and leaned forward. "Who are you, Light Yagami, to play god? To kill people whom you deem unworthy? Under whose authority did you act?"

Raito was frozen, his eyes on the doctor's, just inches from his face. The doctor's grip on his face tightened painfully, and he flinched but didn't try to pull away.

"Anyone can play god," Crowley whispered. "They just need the right tools and the right timing."

Raito's eyes were wide, but he was still unable to speak.

"You and I are not so very different, Light Yagami," Crowley continued. "We are cuts from the same fabric." His thumb ran in rough circles across Raito's cheek, and Raito shuddered. "We both like to play games. We both hate losing." The doctor sounded almost like L, and Raito's eyes closed so Crowley would not see the pain. "Open your eyes, Light Yagami," he said. Raito did, banishing his emotion. "We both need to be in control. The only difference between us, the thing that gives me the right to play with you like this, is that you are a murderer." Raito flinched. "You have been judged, and you have been found less than human, unable to make even basic decisions without hurting those around you. I am still considered to be a man, one deserving of authority. And you, Light Yagami—you are an animal."

Raito flinched backwards, then savagely leaned forward and sank his teeth into the doctor's smooth hand. He released it quickly, spitting out the blood. Crowley laughed, drawing his hand up to examine it closely. "Wonderful," he murmured. "You give me such interesting new data, almost daily. I enjoy working with you, Light Yagami." He paused to wrap a bandage around his hand. "I shall be sorry when I finally break you," he whispered, then stepped back and pressed the red button again.

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Matt stops the video, staring at the screen in disgust. He doesn't think he can take any more of Raito's hoarse, sobbing screams. Even though he knows that they need to watch this so they know exactly what they're dealing with when it comes to breaking Raito out, it has still shaken him. He has never liked to play these sorts of games. It almost makes him sorry that he hacked into Crowley's database, even though L asked him to do it. "That's just a little bit of the footage," Matt tells L, not turning away from the computers to speak. "Crowley's got thousands of video clips on here, everywhere from thirty seconds to 108 hours long. Almost every day is accounted for. And look how he's labeling them. It looks like he'll have corresponding notes, probably handwritten, filed away somewhere."

"That guy is one fucked up bastard," Mello comments, his eyes narrowed as he fingers the rosary around his neck. Matt glances at him. Holding the crucifix is a mild sign of insecurity in Mello, but Matt doesn't see any reason for alarm, so he doesn't say anything.

For once, L does not ask Mello to watch his language. He navigates through the stolen video footage, clicking on a clip that reads November 10th, two years ago.

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The video feed came up as a blurry picture that cleared as the camera focused. Raito was sitting, hunched over on his cot, hands around his ankles protectively. His feet were heavily bandaged, as were his palms and wrists. Blood was seeping through the bandage on his left ankle, and Light was obviously taking great care with that foot. He moved slowly, as if underwater, to lie down on the bed, still in an uncomfortable curled position. His hands, despite the bandages, twisted together and he scratched at any part of them left unbandaged, drawing blood in several places. Eventually, he brought his wrist up to his teeth and tore the bandage, letting it unravel and fall onto the floor beside his cot. His eyes were glazed over with pain, and there didn't seem to be anything that suggested that he was fully aware of his situation. As he moved, his leg twitched and he buried his face in the mattress and screamed, the sound almost ringing clear, even through the cot.

His eyes watering, his lips twitching into a smile, he raised his head. A slight melody, mostly just random hums could barely be heard above the stillness of the room. Raito pulled his hand up to his face, the other following closely because they were handcuffed with very little room to spare, and examined the torn flesh carefully. It was mostly scratches and teeth marks that scored his skin, but there were also nearly healed burns.

As the camera watched, he put his hand to his mouth and licked it experimentally. "Tastes terrible," he whispered, his voice sounding amused. His lips curled up into a smile and he bit into his skin on the side of his palm, hard, the wet, slick sound of tearing flesh and lips against torn muscle and dripping blood overwhelming the sounds of his sporadic humming. After he'd torn a good piece off so that it was just hanging on, he stopped and examined his handiwork, his smile more pronounced than ever as he laughed a little. He put his hand between his lips and licked it again. "Terrible," he repeated.

The door swung open and Crowley entered. "I saw that you finally woke up, Light," Crowley said. He seemed a bit off, perhaps because of Raito's gruesome display.

Raito continued licking the blood off his hand, staring at the doctor. His smile was terrible, if only because it looked too real. It wasn't that it was cold and didn't reach his eyes. It was in his eyes, burning and intense and manic. He didn't answer.

"What are you doing?" Crowley asked, walking over to Raito's bed without hesitation.

Raito's eyes flicked up to the ceiling, then back at the doctor. "I'm thirsty," he said. Crowley looked fascinated, like a small child being shown a tide pool and realizing just how much there was to see.

"You could ask for water," Crowley said.

"Oh, I don't want to be a bother," Raito said, and he began to laugh.

*L's hair stands on end; this is the laugh he heard from Raito when he visited him. And from the look on Crowley's face, it is the first time he hears it.*

Crowley stepped forward and took Raito's hand away, rebandaging it and then letting it drop. "You could have drunk from the sink in the corner."

Raito laughed harder. "Do you think I can walk?" he asked, the words punctuation marks at the end of gasps of laughter.

Crowley turned his attention to Raito's left ankle. "No, I don't suppose you can."

Raito grins up at him.

"What amuses you, Light?" Crowley asked, looking rather entertained himself.

"My question."

"What is your question?"

"I already asked you," Raito said, shaking his head in mock annoyance. "You had your chance to answer, and you just laughed. So now I guess it's funny." The aloofness disappeared from his voice as he continued. "No one can answer me," he said, his lips curving and his eyes flashing.

"What is your question?" Crowley repeated, looking a little irritated.

Raito watched the doctor carefully as he unwound the bandage around his other, unharmed hand. Crowley only watched him back as he sunk his teeth into his right hand and began to tear at the flesh there. He only stopped when Crowley jerked his hand away and redid the bandage.

"Why did you do that?" Crowley asked. "How are you feeling?"

Raito laughed harder than ever, and the sound echoed off the walls in the small cell. "I was . . . hungry . . . that time," he finally managed to say in between fits of laughter.

"I would like for you to repeat the question you think is so funny," Crowley informed him.

Raito's laughter stopped abruptly and he looked at the doctor seriously. He knelt up from where he'd been laying on the bed, so that he was closer to eye level. "No," he said, and his voice was threatening. "You had your chance and you laughed. And no one else here can answer. No one will. Do you know what that means, Doctor?"

Crowley only stared at him. Apparently, Raito's abrupt mood swings were not something he'd experienced before.

"It means that you don't have all the answers. It means that you don't know everything." Raito paused, and his eyes were gleaming in amusement, though his lips stayed twisted down into a frown. "And do you know what that means?"

"What?" Crowley seemed to be answering against his own will as he stared into Raito's flashing sepia eyes.

Raito leaned closer to the doctor. "It means," he whispered, licking his lips, "that you have no power over me." And then he wrapped his bloody and bandaged hands around the doctor's neck and constricted, pressing with all his weight until Crowley jerked away, his eyes wide in alarm, and pulled out a familiar remote.

"Oh, not that again," Raito shrieked, his tone mocking and amused, even as he lost his balance and fell off the bed and screamed as his left ankle hit the floor. "Please, not electroshock," he said, his voice simpering and scornful. He laughed at Crowley's hesitation as he lay on the floor. Crowley turned the dial to a higher power, and Raito made no move to stop him, only laughed harder.

"A word of caution, Doctor Crowley," Raito said. His words sounded almost like a song, and Crowley paused, looking down at him. Raito grinned up at him. "If you press that button now, I won't want to talk to you anymore. And since you don't have any power, you'd have to ask really nicely to get me to change my mind." Crowley stared at him, his finger poised over the button. Then his eyes changed, became colder as he tried to reassert control. Raito noticed and his eyes narrowed, smile disappearing in an instant. "Press it then," he hissed, venom in every syllable. "Press it and go to hell."

Crowley pressed the button, his eyes almost panicked. Raito's screams filled the video recording as he writhed on the ground.

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Mello is no stranger to torture; he has both dished it out and taken in it his twenty years life. But this scene disturbs him, and he isn't quite sure why. Perhaps it is Raito's expression, eyes gleaming with childish pleasure and petulance even as he screams and arches his back; perhaps it is how, after several minutes, when his voice begins to give out, Raito actually starts laughing, hysterically laughing through the pain; perhaps it is how finally, when he has no breath left, the dry sobs come, and there are still no tears in his eyes.

But then, Mello realizes. It is none of these things; it is how the expression on Doctor Crowley's face turns from panicked and frightened to delighted; it is how he watches Raito scream with a hungry expression on his face; it is how he laughs when Raito does; and it is how, once Raito has finally, after nearly twenty minutes of this pain, fainted, the doctor does not stop until all Raito is a twitching mass on the ground. And it is how, as he walks out of Raito's room, delicately stepping to avoid the blood on the floor from Raito's throat and hands, Crowley's expression is so cheerful, so satisfied, that Mello actually feels slightly ill.

L's finger hesitates above the keypad, then finally, he clicks on the video feed marked as the day after his visit.

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Raito was sitting in the same position L had seen him in—cross-legged, with his head bowed and his hands chained in front of him. His fingers seemed to be entities separate from the rest of his body, constantly twitching and moving and fighting with one another, causing bright red scratch marks to appear, though he didn't draw blood this time.

The room was utterly, painfully silent, except for Raito's irregular breathing, harsh and soft. The door swung open noiselessly, and Crowley stepped over the threshold. Raito didn't look up, but the teeth that were previously just nipping his lower lip dig in with new vigor, and his hands begin straining the boundaries of the handcuffs, cool metal cutting into too-old scars and now-burning open wounds on his wrists.

"Light Yagami," Crowley said. He didn't look up, but a slight crease between his eyes formed. "Look at me," Crowley said.

Raito looked up then, his wide, blank eyes staring into Crowley's harsh blue ones.

"What did you say to him?" Crowley asked.

Raito flinched, but didn't speak.

"We know you spoke to L's assistant," Crowley continued, advancing on Raito with a speed unmatched in the other video feeds. "Although he had us turn off the cameras and the microphones in this room, we have sensors that picked up the vibrations of your voice." Crowley paused as though this were a real conversation, as though he were giving Raito the chance to respond. "What did you say?" he hissed finally, when there was still no reaction.

Raito didn't flinch. His wide eyes made no indication that he had even heard the doctor.

Crowley stepped forward until they were only a few feet away, then he leaned in and calmly backhanded Raito hard enough to send him sprawling onto the concrete floor. Raito didn't move from where he had fallen, except to turn his head so that he was still staring at the doctor. Immediately, Crowley knelt next to him. He brushed the hair out of Raito's eyes, then moved his hand down to cup his face.

Raito did not react.

"What did you say?" Crowley repeated.

Raito blinked. His lips twitched.

*L knows that look, he remembers that face from years and years ago, when he and Raito would argue over something pointless and they were both having so much fun that they tried to stay angry, but Raito couldn't quite pull it off. Raito is amused. He likes playing this game with Crowley.*

Crowley couldn't tell that it was just a game to Raito, and his fingers moved down to Raito's pale throat and began to compress.

"Do you think that I'll let you breathe this time?" Crowley whispered, sounding deranged and furious. There was a brief flash of some emotion in Raito's eyes—perhaps fear? "I don't have to," he continued. "We can claim you died of natural causes. Or that you killed yourself, they would believe that."

Suddenly, the game was too much for Raito, and his lips twitched into the vague semblance of a smile. He spoke to Crowley for the first time in two years. "You don't scare me," he said.

Crowley's fingers constricted suddenly, leaving him gasping for air. Still, Raito made no move to fight him off.

"You didn't let me finish," Raito gasped, fingernails tearing and breaking off on the cement floor. Crowley relented, just enough to allow a small stream of air in and out of his lungs. "I was going to say, you don't scare me. Do you remember what I said to you, before?" Crowley nodded.

And Raito laughed. "You don't scare me, because you don't have any power over me. And do you know why?"

"I don't care," Crowley all but snarled.

"But you'll listen," Raito said, beginning to smile again. "You don't because I want to die. I want you to take my air. I want you to drain it from me, to drain my blood or take my breath or inject smooth poison. And even if you don't, every time you hurt me, it reminds me of death. And it tastes so good." He began laughing, now with real sound, real force behind it, and Crowley actually recoiled.

Raito sat up, staring at the doctor with bright, cruel, strangely empty eyes. "You wanted to see what you could do to twist my mind. You wanted to see how you could maim my pride." He gestured to himself. "Here it is," he whispered.

Crowley stared.

"Get out," Raito said, his voice so quiet that it could barely be heard above Crowley's laboring breathing.

And Matthias Crowley, who was, for the first time in his career, actually terrified of one of his patients, one of his creations, left.

*"Fuck," Mello mutters, more in amazement than disapproval.*

Raito watched him leave, and when the door slammed shut again he screamed, pressing his face to the cold cement. It was an awful, high-pitched, grating shriek, and eventually it gave way to laughter. His body shook with his uneven laughs, but after some time, he began shivering.

*L leans forward, not understanding. What could have possibly have broken him at this point? It can't be, not after all this.*

But it was. Thoroughly spent, laughter exhausted, Raito laid on the floor, his hands tearing one another to shreds, his body trembling as he cried.

The video feed ended.

"There's no more," Matt says, scanning the video files. "Not just on this file, I mean. Ever. This is the last feed they have of him."

L leans forward, glancing over Matt's shoulder to make certain he is correct. "Then we must speed up this process," he informs them, remembering Crowley's look of crippling fear and murderous hate as he ran from Raito's room. "I am certain Light will have been punished for his audacity."

Mello leans forward over the blueprints of the asylum as Matt begins running codes alongside Crowley's database, seeing which of them match up like DNA. They need no further encouragement than L's words and the video's they have just seen.

L disappears for a moment, and Mello assumes that he has just gone to replenish his sweets, which completely disappeared during the hours they'd been immersed in the security footage of Raito's cell. But when L comes back, he is carrying nothing but a small black notebook.

"Before we proceed," he says. "There is something I must show you."

Curiously, Mello leans forward and reaches instinctively for the notebook, which L hands over with just a brief second's hesitation.

Mello doesn't scream, he hasn't screamed since he was old enough to speak (unless it was necessary for some sort of plan, or to get people to do what he says). But he stares, speechless for one of the few times in his life, at the black monstrosity in front of his eyes. He is so startled that he doesn't even notice when Matt snatches the notebook away from him, something that Mello would have despised ordinarily.

Matt does scream, though it is more of a hoarse, profanity filled shout of terror than anything high-pitched. He doesn't look at the shinigami long, however, and instead turns to L for an explanation. He vaguely remembers there being some sort of debate over the paranormal in the Kira trial.

L's thumb is in his mouth, watching their reactions. "This is Ryuk," he says dully. "And that Death Note was Light Yagami's murder weapon."

Ryuk chuckles. "Is that what you're calling it now, L?" he asks. L nods.

"Where the hell has he been all this time?" Mello demands, finally getting his voice back.

"He can only be seen by those who have touched the notebook. Or pages of the notebook," L explains.

"Holy hell," Matt mutters. "A death god, right?"

Ryuk looks quite pleased with all the commotion he is causing; but then, he more or less always looks pleased.

"A shinigami, that is correct," L agrees, as though it is every day that he meets with one of these. Perhaps it is, for all Matt and Mello know. "He will be of little use to us on this mission," L continues, "but I thought it was prudent to make you aware of his existence and the existence of the Death Note."

"This is Light's?" Mello asks, snatching the notebook away from Matt and briefly perusing the How to Use section. His eyes widen.

"Yes," L says.

Mello's eyes flicker between the rules written in the Death Note and the shinigami. "Huh," he says, looking amused. "This is gonna be one hell of a distraction, L."

Matt can read what is going on in Mello's brain, and he smiles a little.

Ryuk points towards himself. "Me?" he asks disbelievingly. Then he chuckles. "You want me to be your distraction?"

Mello shrugs. "All you'd have to do was follow the Death Note," he says. Ryuk continues laughing.

"I do that anyway," he admits. "I want apples though."

L sighs, looking put upon. "There were a dozen apples on the kitchen counter," he says. "I had Watari put them there a few days ago."

"That was a few days ago."

"Then we shall get you more," L says. "After we are finished breaking Light out of his prison."

"When will that be?" Ryuk wants to know.

L pretends to think about it. "Tomorrow night?" he suggests, looking towards Matt and Mello for their agreement. They both nod. "Then I have devised a way for us to get into the asylum," L continues. "As long as your plans are flexible."

"How flexible?" Mello asks, snapping into his chocolate as blue eyes skim pages of deadly white writing.

L shrugs. "If you feel incapable," he begins, but Mello cuts him off.

"You know damn well we're capable, L," he snaps. "Just tell us what we need to do."

L nods. That he can do.

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A/N: . . . I know, right? Sorry if anyone has a squeamish stomach, I should have warned you at the beginning, but that would've totally ruined all the fun. So there.

You guys. College is HARD. Dang it, stupid math courses. I have decided to forgo answering reviews in favor of updating as often as possible. It is currently three a.m., I am exhausted, and I stayed up just to edit this chapter. Just for you. YES, YOU. So, I am really sorry. I cherish the conversations and great feedback I get when I reply to reviews, but there simply isn't enough time. Every time I post a chapter, I plan on thanking you all for how awesome you are. And if you ask me something directly, I'll do my best to get back to you. But I'm taking approx. 1 million credits this semester, and I want to die already. Hello, second week of school.

Anyways, lemme know if you liked! I really appreciate the people who have told me that they are determined to review every chapter--I'm always waiting and then really excited when I get your reviews! Thank you for your dedication!

## \*Chapter 5\*: Descent

### Chapter 5

Edited and reposted as of 09.06.09

A/N: I forgot to put this warning here last chapter, so I'll put it in here. There are some squicky parts here. This and the last chapter are some of the main reasons this fic is rated 'M.' If you don't like torture scenes or feel sick when you read about gore, then skip over those parts. This is your only warning.

P.S. This is what I do for fun :|

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10:36 a.m. Undisclosed location

"Crowley Institute, this is Susannah. How may I help you?"

"This is L."

"Oh, yes. Dr. Crowley has been expecting your call. Please hold a moment and I'll transfer you to his office."

"Thank you."

L attacks his ice cream as the line buzzes idly. He hates waiting.

The phone on the other end of the call beeps once, then Crowley's voice speaks clearly. "This is Matthias Crowley," he announces.

L is aware that Crowley knows perfectly well who he is. "This is L," he says anyway, as Crowley is obviously waiting for the admission.

"Hello," Crowley says politely, and when L doesn't respond, he continues. "How can I help you, L? Do you have questions about your assistant's visit several weeks ago?"

"No, Doctor. Everything is quite clear regarding Prisoner Yagami."

"I trust that you were satisfied?"

*"That's what I said to your mother last ni—Ow, goddammit, Matt, what the hell was that for?"*

*"Shut up and pay attention, Mell!"*

*Sounds of a brief but violent scuffle that L does his level best to ignore.*

"Indeed," he murmurs to the doctor. "I am quite impressed with Yagami's progress."

"Really? Well, it's always enjoyable to hear that one's work is appreciated. As for Yagami's silence . . ."

"He spoke to my agent, Doctor, when Ryuzaki told him that he was working for me. And nothing he said dissatisfied me. Actually, I was pleasantly surprised by his development."

"Did he? How interesting. I'll record it."

"It was an enlightening experience, even second hand."

"I'm pleased to hear that everything was to your satisfaction. Did you receive his records? I'm sorry fro the confusion we've had for the past two years."

"Yagami's status is not a major concern of mine. Only a passing thought. The records, as you say, arrived and are acceptable."

"Excellent. Did you want to send Ryuzaki for another visit?"

"Oh, no. You misunderstand my reason for calling. First, I would like to commend you on your work with Yagami. He seems quite humbled."

"Thank you. We've worked extensively with him."

*"I've worked extensively with your mother!"*

*"Matt! Don't tell me to shut up when you're just going to do the same thing!"*

*More arguing. More fighting. L sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. Of course he's no expert, but from the increasing violence and irritability behind him, he'd say that they those two need to have a few hours of alone time.*

"Secondly," he continues, "I have recently apprehended two serial killers here in France. You may have heard about it?"

"Is it the Boîte de Verre case?"

"That is correct. After hearing of your progress with Yagami, I wonder if you would be interested in working with these two murderers. They have a similar complex, and I believe that your asylum would be most beneficial to them."

"You are the one who understands criminal minds, L. If you say they belong here, who am I to argue?"

*He is a thousand times worse than Raito ever was. He lies like he believes what he is saying. And perhaps he does.* "Very well."

"When shall I expect them?"

"My assistant, Ryuzaki, will deliver them tonight, if possible. Will you have rooms open for them at that time?"

"Yes."

"Good. You may want to set aside some time in the evening. There are a few details I would like to brief you on involving these criminals."

"Of course. I will have Susannah rearrange my schedule and prepare the rooms."

"Thank you for your cooperation."

"It is my pleasure."

*I'm sure.* L hangs up and immediately after he snaps his phone shut, he is subjected to Matt and Mello howling with laughter.

"Now that Crowley has been contacted and has agreed to host the two of you as his new patients, all that remains is to make you look like murderers," L says speculatively, half-joking. He won't deny the fact that, despite the seriousness of Raito's imprisonment, he is having at least a little fun. Breaking someone out of prison is not something he's

done before, after all.

Matt and Mello treat his comment seriously, and Mello checks himself in a mirror before tucking his crucifix inside his shirt and pulling on his combat boots. "There," he says. "Done."

Matt grins at Mello's preparations, and rolls up his sleeves, displaying scars that he is perversely proud to bear, all of various lengths and depths, and all from either Mello or from protecting him. He runs a hand through his hair, making it messy, then does the same to Mello.

"Done," he repeats.

L surveys them in amusement. "I'm sorry to say that I think you are correct," he tells them as Watari places the tea and chocolate he has been carrying in on a tray down. "You could easily pass as murderers, at least visually."

"I think, technically, I am," Mello says casually, reaching for the chocolate bar Watari has brought him.

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that," L says.

Watari looks at L. "Your plan has remained unchanged?" he asks.

L nods. "More or less," he says. "Admittedly, it is perhaps unreasonably precarious, but I had to leave room for improvisation. We don't know how loyal or intelligent Crowley's therapists and guards are, and we have no time to find out. I still think, regardless of wild cards, this plan still has a sixty-eight percent chance of succeeding with minimal injuries. There is, of course, a seventy percent chance that something will go horribly wrong, and we will have to think quickly to remain in control of the situation, what with so many unstable inmates."

"Leave the inmates to me," Mello says, grinning what can only be described as an insane smile. "They'll follow me."

L takes in Mello's smile, his eyes widening. "I do not doubt it," he says finally. Matt's lips twitch into a smile behind his cigarette. L might think he knows Mello, but it isn't anything like the way Matt knows him. Mello can charm even inanimate objects at times, like broken down motorcycles or stones. Getting men who are only slightly less crazy than he is to follow his lead will barely even be a challenge.

"We should prepare ourselves for our departure," L says, glancing at Ryuk to make sure the shinigami is listening. He is, of course, watching them prepare with wide, interested eyes and a broad smile that widens further when he sees that he has L's attention.

"Now all that is left is for the two of you to be unconscious," L says, finishing his chocolate cake and standing.

Mello raises his eyebrows. He doesn't like this idea, and his fingers press against the crucifix under his shirt. Matt subtly shifts so that he is standing half between Mello and L. He doubts that Mello would do anything to hurt L, but he likes to stay visible when Mello is tense.

"You must appear to be, at any rate," L clarifies. Mello relaxes and after a second, Matt leans back against the wall, taking a deep drag from his cigarette.

L notices their silent interaction and he finds himself fascinated by it. He has seen them, even spoken to them separately, and he found them interesting then. Together, they are absorbing. L is greatly surprised by Matt's ability to empathize and immediately analyze the emotional situation. He will remember it.

"We can do that, sure," Mello says, glancing at Matt, who looks indifferent.

"We will leave then," L says, and heads for the door.

"We're flying, right?" Matt asks, pushing off the wall and following behind L and Mello.

"In my helicopter, yes."

"Is Wammy flying it?" Mello asks dubiously, glancing at Watari, who is cleaning up their dishes, then following them.

"Don't be unreasonable. I wouldn't expect him to know how to fly a helicopter, on top of everything else he does. You and Matt will pilot it, Mello. I would do the honors, but I must spend all the available time planning."

*5:56 p.m. Recovery Room, Crowley Institute*

Raito lays right where he is, perfectly still, trying not to even let his breathing disturb his frame.

This is the time of darkness, when the room is so black and oppressive that Raito knows that it must be nighttime outside as well.

The guards are less active, and Raito can normally hear the screams of the other prisoners, other murderers—screams of rage, of terror, of denial, of pure, insane hatred.

When he is conscious, when he is in control (however tenuous), Raito never screams. When he sleeps, though, it is a different situation. Or especially when he can feel his madness creeping, a slow and prickling poison in his veins, making his fingers scramble and his nails tear on the cement floor or the metal table, demanding payment, demanding the slick feel of hot blood on his tongue, the wetness between his teeth, and the sharp, delightful taste of life and suffering coating his throat.

This is a different time, when he is not himself. He would scream then, relishing the ripping of the soft and scarred tissue in his throat, and he bites and scratches and twists, trying to find more pain, trying to find the source of the pain and make it grow until his body is so spent he does not have to stay with it anymore. And he loses himself entirely to the madness, and the fear devours him, and his own words—though he cannot recognize them as his own, he can't tell until he comes back to himself later—echo in his brain, taunting him.

His confession to L, knowing that he needs to kill him; his testimony in the courtroom and his father's eyes; his crying and begging Crowley to stop the first time the doctor had branded his back with long, glowing metal rods, just to see how he would react; his senseless sobbing and whimpering when Crowley operates on his left hand while he is still entirely awake, feeling the sharp bite of the scalpel, screaming as Crowley touches the bare nerves with his ungloved fingers.

These are all events he remembers when the sickness takes and torments him, but Raito doesn't know they are his memories, not until he wakes up. All he knows is pain and humiliation and betrayal. All he knows is submission to the madness as he screams and writhes.

Raito can feel his sickness creeping in his blood, and to distract himself—anything is better than sinking under and waking up, knowing that he has lost again, knowing that he keeps losing and that it lasts longer, feels stronger every time—he focuses on the pain in his right ankle, trying to move it despite the restraints that bind him to the cold metal table.

All his muscles contract and clench and a crying noise, like the kind wounded animals make, escape his lips as he succeeds, pain shooting up from his ankle all the way to his groin, making his leg spasm and burn. The pain is nauseating, and he turns his head and vomits, only slick bile coming up because he has not been fed in days. Raito coughs roughly and turns his head the other way, sickened by the bile on the table next to him, dampening his hair and the back of his neck.

He begins shivering in earnest now, fully feeling the hunger clawing at his stomach and creating empty space in his torso until he feels as though he has no organs, only his heart, thumping too fast, skipping beats.

He flinches again and gasps in soundless, dry sobs as the memories cloud his vision, driving the madness inside him, making him scream.

He sees a copper-haired man, strapped to a surgical table, struggling as another man, tan and blue-eyed, selects a scalpel and drives it into the soft flesh of his ankle.

The other man stops suddenly, giving a keening scream as the scalpel hits bone, and his surgeon smiles and pulls the blade out, watching as the bright red blood flows.

"That was just to the left of your Achilles' tendon, Light," the surgeon says, watching with hungry eyes as his subject sobs, tears staining his thin face.

The surgeon waits until his test subject has calmed before he plunges the blade in again, smile growing as the patient screams again. This time, he holds the blade in the flesh of the ankle, angling it towards the other cut, crimson staining his hand.

"That was to the right," he continues, his cool voice carrying over, cutting through the patient's animal whimpering.

"Now, I am going to drag this surgical blade across your tendon, Light, cutting through it and joining the two incisions."

"Please," the patient gasps, the first coherent word tearing from his lips between sobs. He is restrained by many straps, but he is tense and still struggles despite them, bruising the soft skin on his arms and legs and neck. "P-please. Don't." The doctor shifts the blade a little, getting a better angle. "God, don't!" the subject nearly screams. "P-p-please! D-don't!" He is crying so hard the words are almost impossible to get out.

"Perhaps you will think twice, next time you consider running," the surgeon murmurs.

"Yes!" the patient agrees; he is hysterical now, anything will set him screaming.

"Though, with this injury, I don't know that you'll be walking again, much less running," the surgeon continues.

"Please!" the patient starts to shout, but he cuts himself off as the doctor rips the blade straight across his ankle, tearing muscle and skin and even severing the nerves. He can feel it drag across his bone, chipping off pieces, and he screams again, this one ragged and animalistic, high-pitched and keening. It lasts for much longer than his previous one before he collapses on the table, sobbing again.

The surgeon examines his reaction. "You won't run again, will you, Light?"

The subject doesn't answer, and when he finally raises his head, it is tear-streaked. He can barely get the words out when he asks, "What am I?" His voice catches on every syllable.

The doctor just stares at him for a moment, then he chuckles, deep and pleased. "You won't run again, will you, Light?" he repeats, and the body of the subject slumps onto the table again.

"No," he whispers, utterly defeated, utterly spent.

The other man just laughs again and tosses the blade onto the floor as he walks out of the room, leaving his patient's ankle to bleed sluggishly.

Light startles himself into consciousness, his own screaming loud in his ears. He shuts his mouth with a snap, and presses the side of his face into the metal table that is always cold, no matter how much he sweats, no matter how much body heat he puts into it.

Breathing deeply, he tries to focus just on physical aches. His right ankle, torn and mutilated in exactly the same manner as his left when Crowley figured out that he had spoken to L, burns like sake held too long in his mouth. They gave him painkillers a few hours ago, to dull his mind and make him less likely to fight them as they moved him from the surgery room to this one. The guards laughed as one of them had to pick him up to carry him there, and one of them leaned over him and played with his hair, mentioning how soft it was, what shampoo did he use?

He was past the point where he thought in 'if only's', but years ago, he would have thought if only he had his Death Note, if only he hadn't been so fucking stupid and turned himself in, if only he hadn't trusted L, if only he had killed L Lawliet, his rival, his enemy, his first and only real friend, the first and only person he'd ever really wanted. He hates him. He misses him. He wants to kill him. He wants to kiss him.

But that was years ago, and now all Raito thinks about is how to keep the madness at bay for just a few more minutes, just a few more seconds where he doesn't have to remember without knowing why he is suffering, just a little while longer not to be screaming and completely out of control. L's visit unraveled him, as did his treatment when they found out he'd spoken to him. But now he has been moved, and no one has come in to press hot metal to his skin or wash his body for him because his ankle disallows movement or to check his reflexes as a taser set at a low power is pressed to different parts of his body.

He wonders how long this peace will last. They haven't let him sleep for days, not really, just little naps between what they call his therapy sessions and he calls torture. He can feel fatigue itching at his eyes, weighing down his body despite his desperation and hunger and thirst and just suffering. Raito knows that if he sleeps, he will have nightmares and he will be sorry, but his body is begging for it. His head rolls to one side and then the other, chafing the sides of his neck against the leather straps that hold his head down. His eyes slip shut but he opens them and—

*mustn't sleep mustn't let them get to me if I sleep they will see and they will do things in the darkness—who knows what I will be made to suffer—*

*those bastards I should kill them I can kill them I should even without the Note, God if I could only get my hands on a Death Note, Matthias Crowley I will kill you first*

*it's so dark in here*

*before L Lawliet before Quillsh Wammy before Yagami Soichiro or Matsuda Touta Mogi Kanzo Shuichi Aizawa remember these names—these are your enemies some of the only men who know you are Kira*

*I was Kira*

*you are Kira still this desire to lie to hide to kill to destroy lives still lives in you, you breathe death Light Yagami*

*I am Kira and if I ever get the chance I will kill them Matthias Crowley first, then those men on the task force then Quillsh Wammy and then Yagami Light, but I will leave you, L Lawliet, because you won in the first place and*

*there are things darker than me in the shadows*

*I will leave you surrounded by death and God help you because*

*this blood will be on your hands*

*and God, this hurts my ankle hurts my chest my stomach I'm hungry I'm hungry*

*I'm thirsty there's no blood no taste everything is black and white*

*why does it have to hurt so much*

*I want blood on my hands*

*these hands have done so much have hurt so much have killed over and over both of them right and left*

*and please someone help me*

*need to tear them, feel taste the blood that runs in them killer's blood my blood*

*can I get out of here*

*no it hurt too badly last time*

*I have to get out I can't take this I shouldn't have to take this I am Kira, I am Yagami Light*

*shadows creep darker than the midnight room, darker than my thoughts*

*all I wanted was death, L, you bastard, you joke*

*you couldn't even give me that, in my defeat. you had to torture me humiliate me make me suffer for my crimes*

*justice wasn't enough for you*

*you wanted revenge*

*well so do I.*

*I have to get out of here.*

*I can't it's too dark I just want to scream please someone get me out of here*

*Have to think. Think clearly*

*God but it hurts this box at the base of my spine shocking and controlling and manipulating hurting me every time I slip even when I don't*

*please make the pain stop I will do what you say*

*and my ankle, fuck I can't even move it*

*they hurt me even when I cooperate I can't take it there's no sense to it*

*please I can't take this, don't make me do this*

*how can I run*

*and when they catch me, how can I take what they will do*

*I can't take it I can't not again they can't cut me again please don't shock me again don't hurt me, damn it, please don't hurt me I can't take this!*

*I hate them I will find a way not to kill them, but to make them sorry to make them suffer first because I learned this from you L Lawliet*

*I don't want justice either*

*I want revenge.*

Raito falls asleep, his face twisted into a grimace and his body trembling.

9:47 p.m.

He wakes a few hours later, not to the usual nighttime screams. These are louder, panicked, so much closer. He can hear footsteps outside his room, and he realizes why the voices are so much clearer.

His door is open, and there is someone inside.

9:00 p.m. *Helicopter Pad #3, the roof of Crowley Institute for the Criminally Insane*

L arrives at nine o'clock at the front gates of the Crowley Institute, and he and Watari direct Crowley's men as they unload the limp bodies of Matt and Mello from the helicopter. The guards begin strapping them onto the gurneys they have brought, but L tells them that it isn't necessary, that the drugs he gave them will keep them unconscious for another 24 hours.

L follows the guards inside. Watari has orders to remain with the helicopter on the roof.

Crowley greets him, all smiles and warm words of welcome, and L honestly has to exert a considerable amount of self control not to take one of the guard's guns and tase him.

L Lawliet has never had much patience for liars.

The guards wheel Mello and Matt into the search room, where they will be stripped and have any weapons or personal affects removed. Crowley follows them, and as he appears to be settling down in the room, L decides that it would be best to set their plan into effect.

"You may want to find somewhere more comfortable, Doctor," L says politely. "I have much to discuss with you involving these two. They will likely prove difficult, and while L does not doubt your abilities, he thinks that some of his insights may prove useful to you."

"Oh," Crowley says, surprised. He is generally present for the search, since sometimes the personal items of murderers in straight from capture lend him some insight into their personality. Light had arrived with nothing in his pockets but a ballpoint pen, which Crowley had confiscated and now keeps locked in his drawer. He supposes, though, that the search will be taped, so there is no real need for him to be there. He nods to the guards and stands. "After you," he says to L.

L turns and walks out of the room. He can see that Crowley has bought his lies about Light; and why shouldn't he? Crowley is not used to anyone challenging his authority, not when he is *the* supposed expert on insane criminal minds.

L thinks that Crowley probably must be the expert, since he is one of the most devious L has ever encountered.

Crowley catches up to L as they walk through the administrative section of the institute. It is plush and comfortable, a stark contrast to the prison, which is utilitarian and frightening. "I had not heard that L had caught the killers in France," he says, making somewhat idle conversation as they walk towards his office. L had planned on Crowley taking him there.

"It came as something of a surprise to L, actually. The criminals heard he was in France and developed the ambition of killing him."

"I take it that didn't go over well."

"L is able to defend himself quite capably, actually. It was a simple matter to disarm them after they were unconscious."

"That's quite impressive. He is well-versed in self defense, then?"

"Yes, various forms of martial arts." L allows himself to smile a bit.

"Interesting." Crowley palms the door in front of them and steps into his office. "Please, take a seat."

L has been here once before, and nearly grimaces as he sinks into one of Crowley's soft chairs. He sits normally, which irritates him, but is necessary to maintain an inconspicuous façade.

"Thank you," he says politely, remembering those lessons on mannerisms that Watari had tried to teach him years and years ago.

Crowley nods at the nicety. "Now, what can you tell me about our murderers?"

L smiles as he leans forward. "First of all," he says, with a slight smile, "they are adept both at acting and maneuvering their way out of tight situations."

9:12 p.m. *Examination and Admittance Room, Third Floor*

As soon as the doctor's footsteps have faded, Mello's eyes snap open. He glances at the guard nearest to him, who is currently absorbed in putting on latex gloves.

"Excuse me," he says as he notices Matt's eyes opening too, "but where the fuck do you think you'll be putting those fingers?"

9:13 p.m. *Dr. Matthias Crowley's personal office*

As L continues to lie about Matt and Mello, he can faintly hear alarm bells beginning to buzz in the asylum, and it is not long before Crowley can hear them as well. He frowns and stands up.

"Excuse me," he says.

"Of course," L says, standing as well.

Crowley opens his cell phone and presses number one. The phone rings, but there is no answer. His frown deepens. "It sounds as though there is something wrong in the examination room," he says, heading for the door.

Then he is on the ground, breathing shallowly, unconscious. L sets his foot back on the ground. "Actually, Doctor," he says conversationally, "there is something wrong in here."

9:23 p.m. *Security room #2*

It takes Matt and Mello sixty seconds to incapacitate their guards, but not before one of them presses the emergency signal on his cell phone. It irritates them; they had hoped to avoid detection for a while longer. But it certainly doesn't hurt their plan unduly.

It takes Mello another minute to orient himself on the blueprints he was hiding in his shirt, and then to find the most direct route to the security center.

It is five minutes there, as they had to dart into a stairwell to avoid guards, and Mello couldn't resist shooting one. When Matt glares, he says, "What? It's not like it was fatal."

"That's not the point," Matt mutters, but they move on.

The security doors are wide open, since the guards just rushed out to inspect the gunshot they heard, and Matt grudgingly admits the fact that Mello saved them time.

It takes Matt four minutes to shut down all central communication devices, electronically unlock every door in the asylum, to turn off all alarms, and to run a loop, just in case. Mello is bitching at him the entire time about taking too long, and Matt finally snaps at him that how can he fucking *work* with Mello talking and *distracting him*. Mello shuts up; he knows that Matt says things he doesn't mean when he's stressed and busy. He busies himself with his chocolate as Matt lights another cigarette and says, "Done. Sorry I snapped at you."

Mello shrugs, already halfway out the door and pulling out the other item he hid in his shirt, the Death Note. As soon as he is gone, Matt seals the door to his security room and begins hacking Crowley's files from the source.

9:26 p.m.

The first of the inmates notices that his door is unlocked.

9:27 p.m.

The first of the guards notice that the prisoners are not where they are supposed to be.

9:28 p.m.

Mello follows the noise of laughter and gunshots, of screams of panic and of doors creaking and feet running, tearing out a page and tucking the Death Note into the back of his pants; Ryuk follows, chuckling the entire way.

9:30 p.m.

L finds the files he is looking for, buried deep in Crowley's desk drawers. He picks them up carefully; they are quite heavy. He glances at Crowley, still out cold, and shakes his head in disgust. He walks out of the office, then phones Matt.

"Is there any way to lock a door from the inside?" he asks when Matt picks up.

"Sure," Matt says, but he sounds distracted, and there is a faint, high-pitched buzzing in the background.

"Can you please lock Dr. Crowley's office door?" L asks.

Matt only grunts in the affirmative, and then terminates their conversation.

9:31 p.m.

Everyone, from Matt at his computers, watching Mello's progress through the asylum, to L who is walking towards where he remembers Raito's room being, even to the security guards running to the scene of confusion, notices the screaming when the first inmate touches the paper torn from the Death Note.

9:41 p.m.

Mello is laughing; he can't help it. He has finally found the perfect weapon, and it's not because the Death Note makes it so easy to kill. It's because it is the first thing he's found that can create this sort of chaos and panic so *quickly*. Ryuk is laughing too, because this is the most entertaining thing he's done in five years.

The inmates are screaming.

The guards are clueless.

9:42 p.m.

L realizes that he should have probably thought this through a bit more.

Raito's room is empty.

L only freezes for a second, before he turns and begins to run up the stairs, knowing full well that he doesn't get reception in the second basement.

9:43 p.m.

On the monitors, Matt notices a small portion of the asylum that is kept completely dark, and he calls Mello and mentions it. The blackness unnerves him, because he cannot know what is going on there. Mello is having the time of his life, and he tells Matt not to worry, that he'll go check it out. Ryuk goes with him, but the inmates panic more, even when he's gone, because if they can't see him, then he could be *anywhere*.

9:45 p.m.

Matt's phone rings again, and it's L, his voice tight, asking Matt if he can look up on the computers where Raito is, and Matt pulls up footage of Raito's room, realizing with a start that the guards sent a loop to *him*, since on the monitor, it shows Raito sleeping.

"Fuck," he hisses. He didn't think they'd be that smart.

"What?" L asks.

"Just hang on a sec," Matt mutters, pulling up files.

L stands where he is, at the top of the stairs, unwilling to go further until Matt tells him that it's safe.

"Got it," Matt says, his voice snapping. "First floor, back left corridor. Says he's recovering from surgery. Careful of the prisoners in the main room. They're panicking."

L hangs up and starts moving, just as Matt realizes that those directions correspond directly with where he's sent Mello.

9:47 p.m.

Raito can hear quiet laughter in the darkness of his room, and it terrifies him, because not only is it not his, it is familiar.

"Ryuk?" he whispers.

---

A/N : Btw, the first time I posted these chapters, I had someone describe the little shock therapy thingy as Raito getting crucio'd. I thought it was hysterical, and though I can't remember who it was, I want to congratulate them on the superb reference.

Anyways, hope you enjoyed the latest installment in the insane!Raito series. I certainly did, and I also apologize for leaving you at a cliffhanger. My bad, guys :D I'll fix it shortly.

Thanks for all the support I've been getting! I love it! And please let me know if you liked it or if you have any constructive criticism!

## \*Chapter 6\*: Collision

### Chapter 6

A/N: I had some unexpected free time on my hands, so you get a double helping of my stuff. And there was much rejoicing. \*yaaaay\*

P.S. More squicky stuff in this chapter, though not so much as the last two. Enjoy!

---

Ryuk's laughter fills the room. It is loud and invasive, and it echoes in the empty space as Mello flicks the light switch and sickly white lights illuminate the examination room.

Raito's stomach turns even as he feels his mouth twist into an answering grin as the shinigami's laughter permeates his mind. He panics, this laughter is no good for him, it is too much like his own, and he can feel infection straining against his blood, pushing back his humanity. It hurts, this always hurts, everything in here has to be pain or he'd be somewhere else, and his lips turn down into a grimace instead of a smile. He breathes in relief; this madness sitting in his intestines, waiting for a moment where it can force him out of the way and it can take him, drag him to places where he is crying, where he can only know pain, has been beaten back for a few more minutes.

Ryuk glides forward and Raito's frown deepens, because at first the appearance of the shinigami had only seemed to be illusion to him, but with Ryuk moving about and looking at him up and down, Raito can only assume that he is real, especially when he sees the other creature in the room.

There is no way Raito made this one up, and he is not prone to hallucinations. Dreaming while he is still awake would be too kind; he only deals in realities now. Raito takes in the boy's bright, cruel eyes, his agile fingers holding a shining gun, and his lithe, carefully held body.

Raito watches as this new addition walks into the room, his stance careful, and Raito himself tenses, wondering what there is in this room to be afraid of. It can't be Ryuk, the boy is looking at Ryuk constantly, as though reassuring himself that the shinigami is still there. There is still the hint of a smile on Raito's face as the boy approaches the metal examination table, and when he finally reaches Raito, his head twisted to one side in a curious gesture, Raito finally realizes.

He is what is to be afraid of in this room. Raito is *alarming*, something to be feared. As his mind makes the connection, the smile returns to his face and he stares back up at the fierce-looking child in front of him, who is not quite frightened, but who is not comfortable either. And before Raito can stop himself, before he can think better of it, his mind makes another connection: this could be a fun game.

Raito likes games; he always has, ever since L introduced him to the dangerous ones they used to play together. It's a kind of chess where all the pieces are bits and parts of yourself and you have to sacrifice things you believe in, things you are and dreams you could have had, in order to finally say *checkmate*. Raito has been playing a very dangerous kind of chess down here, in Crowley's cold basement floors, and he still isn't sure, now, what pieces he has left to sacrifice.

But this boy looks like he might want to play.

And Raito hasn't had anyone smart enough to really toy with him in such a long time. Not since L was able to say *checkmate*, *take that*, *you bastard*.

Raito doesn't have to think about what his strategy is; the thoughts and plans are already there. And so, as soon as the boy has undone the restraints that bind his wrists and neck, Raito jerks up and, like a snake striking, wraps his emaciated hands around the boy's neck.

He doesn't think he'll actually kill him, but he likes to see the panic, the fear, on someone else's face besides his own, besides his own tear-streaked face in his nightmares and when the sickness takes over him.

This boy doesn't give him what he wants. Instead of fear, all Raito can see is anger, unambiguous, unshakable, and Raito growls, a noise deep in his throat and animalistic as the boy thrashes and grabs at his hands and as Ryuk's laughter grows loud enough that Raito's panting for air and the small noises the blonde boy makes can't be heard.

Raito isn't strong enough, as it is, to snap his neck, so this will be a slow death, if he does decide to kill him, but that almost pleases Raito and the sickness inside of him more, and so he smiles a little more as the boy jerks, trying to get away, shoving at him.

Raito watches as he raises the gun and presses it to Raito's hollow chest. "Let go," he manages to breathe, his blue eyes wide, still in control. Raito hates him for it, and presses harder.

"Do it," Raito whispers back. "Come on, do it. Blow me away."

Mello stares at him for a long moment, his fingers tightening around the trigger as his air begins to run out. His instincts scream at him to pull it, to eliminate the danger he is in the quickest way possible. Damn it all, they didn't do all this for him to just kill Kira!

"Fuck, let go!" Mello whispers, and now all of his air is gone, and Raito is looking at him curiously, wondering if he'll actually do it, hoping that maybe someone will be as fucking crazy as he is in this place. This boy doesn't know that Raito doesn't actually want his death, he just wants his pain, and Mello won't give it to him.

Suddenly, the door is open again, and Raito's fingers go slack and Mello jerks away, pulling his gun away from Raito's chest and hitting him over the head with it.

"You crazy son of a bitch," Mello snarls, coughing. "I'm here to break your sorry ass out, I'm here with L."

"I think he has realized that, Mello," L says from where he is standing in the doorway.

Raito goes still when he hears L's voice, one hand still pressing the side of his head where the butt of Mello's pistol hit him. God, no it can't be L; L left him weeks ago, L left him years ago, what in the hell is he doing here now? Raito shivers, tries to pull his legs up to his chest, but his legs are still bound to the table, and all he succeeds in doing is moving his injured leg and he screams, moving his hand around to his mouth and biting down to muffle the sound.

Mello takes another step back when he hears the noise, keening and even though it is muffled it is too loud in the small space, and Ryuk laughs louder. Mello is backing away, but L steps forward and places his hands on Raito's shoulders, trying to remove the hand before he can do damage with his teeth. Raito jerks away from the touch, his eyes wide, frightened and his heart beating too fast, pounding under his skin and in the hollow of his chest.

"Raito-kun, be still," L orders, and Raito subsides, air still moving too fast in and out of his lungs. His eyes are still wide, taking in the impossible scene of L standing in front of him, touching him, with Ryuk behind his shoulder and the blonde—Mello, he remembers—standing to the side, gun extended and pointed at his head.

L waits for him to calm, and eventually he does, his breathing becoming less violent and him closing his eyes for a few seconds before he is able to take it again. When he does open them, the strangeness of the situation suddenly strikes him as funny, not alarming, and his lips twitch into a smile. Everything had been happening too much, too fast, too much pain and not enough time to process it all, but now.

Now he is calm, now that he can breathe.

"What are you doing here, L?" he asks, his shoulders relaxing in L's grip and L removes his hands.

"Mello, please put away your weapon," L says, speaking again to the blonde. Mello hesitates, then shrugs and puts the safety back into place. The gun disappears. If L thinks it's safe . . . well, L hasn't been wrong yet.

Raito's eyes are hard on L's, staring at him until he gets his answer, and he repeats the question, his voice serious and cold, contradicting the smile he still wears. "L, what are you doing here?"

"I told you I would return, Raito-kun," L says, taking a step back and examining the straps that bind Raito's legs. "Now, do not thrash about. I am going to undo these binding on your legs."

Raito holds still as L frees the rest of his body, finishing what Mello began, and he looks up at Ryuk as L does so.

"Maybe you can tell me what you're doing here," he says, seeing his own, thin and darkly amused face reflected in Ryuk's golden eyes like they're two perfect, gilded mirrors.

Ryuk laughs again. This is the best thing he's done in years, maybe the most entertaining thing he's ever done. "I'm just following my Death Note, like I always do, Raito," he says, gesturing vaguely towards Mello.

Raito's eyes snap over to Mello, his expression so very sane that it sends chills straight down L's spine. "You've got my Death Note, do you?" he asks, his voice soft.

L doesn't like the tone. It's too gentle, too persuasive, too much like the Raito he used to know. "Mello," he says, not removing his gaze from Raito, "could you please go out and make sure the inmates and guards are still in confusion? I would hate for your creative distraction to fall flat."

And even though Mello hates to miss even a second of what is happening here, he knows that this is his job, this is what L wanted him for, so he just nods and pulls his gun back out. "Come on, Ryuk," he says with a grin, and disappears into the dark hallway.

Raito's eyes follow Mello as he leaves, then they snap back to L once he's gone.

They stare at each other as L tries to discern from his expression what Raito is feeling. His face is blank, but his eyes are still too wide, still too pained and L realizes that something must be hurting him. "What is hurting you, Raito-kun?" L asks at length.

Raito stares at him for another moment before laughter bubbles up, despite his best attempts to stop it. "What hurts?" he gasps. "Fuck . . . are you . . . serious?"

L stands, his expression stoic as he watches Raito's thin frame shake. He is still at a bit of a loss as to what he should be doing. "Yes," he says finally.

Raito reaches for him, and L leans in slightly, cautious, but unwilling to believe that Raito would hurt him. Raito only holds onto his shirt, his grip loose and one-handed. "Everything," he hisses, his voice suddenly venomous, his eyes suddenly unamused. L places one hand over Raito's but he recoils, letting go of L's white shirt and tightening his jaw. "My ankle," he explains finally, his voice low.

L moves down and examines Raito's right foot. He begins to pull off the bandage, but Raito hisses in pain and jerks his leg away. "Don't do that," he implores, his voice half angry, half pleading.

L holds his hands up where Raito can see them. "I will not touch it," he says, and Raito relaxes. "What is wrong with it?"

"They sliced through my Achilles' tendon," Raito answers dully.

"Why?"

Raito laughs his breathy and disconnected laughter. "They don't need a reason," he mumbles, arms twining around his good leg, pulling it up to his chest. "They just do what they want." He looks up at L, glaring. "And so do you, L Lawliet."

L winces. "Please," he says. "If Raito-kun could refrain from saying my name aloud, it would be greatly appreciated."

"What are you doing here, L?" Raito demands, sick of these games suddenly. L has already won, anyway. He can have whatever he wants from Raito, but he insists on asking like Raito has a choice, like he could say no.

"I am attempting to help you, Raito-kun," L says simply. He takes one of Raito's hands and holds it, examining it while Raito examines him, looking for a trace of the lie he knows L must be speaking. "We do not have much time, however," L says. "Can you walk?"

Raito shakes his head mutely, tightening his jaw, hating his weakness, and his head jerks as the doors slide open once more and he is met with the sight of yet another person he has never met before.

Matt walks in, taser in one hand and the other in his pocket. "Hey," he greets them. "Figured you'd want help with the stimulation charger."

L nods. "Yes," he agrees, "but what about the cameras and the guards, Matt?"

Matt's grin is crooked because of the cigarette and Raito finds himself beginning to be overwhelmed by the sudden exposure to new experiences and people and God, even the colors these people are wearing seem to hurt his eyes. "I made them a virus they won't get out of their system for decades. And I've locked them all in their rooms," he says smugly. "Trust me, they're a little busy."

"Raito, it's all right," L says, noticing his near-panic. "This is Matt, and he is assisting me."

"We've got to get him to lay down," Matt says, ignoring the fear in Raito's eyes. He pulls his other hand out of his jacket pocket, and when Raito sees what is in it, he is unable to control himself any longer, and suddenly he is taken, overwhelmed and his body moves of its own accord as he starts screaming, scaring the hell out of Matt and L both.

Matt looks at the scalpel in his hand. "Guess that's a trigger," he mutters. "L, can you hold him down? I've got to retrace the injury in the back of his neck to get to the box."

L, who has already moved to Raito in an attempt to calm him, nods grimly and forces Raito to lie on his stomach, no easy task when Raito is thrashing, having an episode. He places one hand in the middle of Raito's back and the other on his head, forcing both down and nodding to Matt, who hesitates.

"Maybe we should wait till he's calm?" Matt suggests, getting into position behind Raito, who has stopped screaming, but is still making little animal noises, mostly moans and whimpers, his eyes wide and unseeing as he thrashes on the table

Raito is remembering, seeing a memory that cannot belong to himself but he can't see who he is anyway, so what the hell does it matter, and there is a doctor in a long white coat, who is standing next to a metal table with a patient strapped down to it, speaking softly to him. Raito can't make out the words, but the doctor is gently brushing the patient's hair with light fingers as he speaks and the patient is shuddering, he is cold, no he's hungry, god, he's hungry, he'd do anything if they just fed him, if they would just give him something to eat, damn it, anything.

*Please please I need to eat this place where my stomach used to be is so empty, it hurts, god it hurts, fuck it hurts.*

"How does it feel, Light?"

"Hurts."

"How?"

"Please let me eat."

The doctor laughs a little, fingers running down the side of the patient's face. "Didn't like those drugs we gave you, did you?" he asks.

"No." The word is almost a whimper.

"Hungry?"

"Yes!" Angry now, yes, he's hungry, yes, he needs food, right now, anything, bread and water would do. Anything with calories, anything with taste.

The doctor's fingers move a lower, to his patient's mouth and suddenly there is a red streak there, painting his bottom lip vermillion.

Without thinking, without wondering, only smelling something of substance, the patient's tongue flicks out and licks the blood off of his mouth, sucking his bottom lip when it is gone, then looking back up at the doctor in horror when he realizes, too late, what it was.



L looks back at Mello and Matt, who are examining the guards, making sure they're dead, and then nodding and getting into the helicopter. Still confused, L looks around; all this in only a few seconds, and he still doesn't know where the first two gunshots came from.

Watari emerges from behind the door of the helicopter, his sniper rifle comfortable in his hands, and L walks forward to greet him.

"That was you," L says. It isn't quite a question, but he needs to be sure; this entire escapade has had an almost surreal edge to it.

Watari nods. "I thought you may need coverage, and when I couldn't reach any of you by phone, I improvised."

"Very good thinking," L says, and not even habit can keep the all-consuming relief from his voice. "Thank you."

Watari smiles as they head towards the helicopter and he helps L load Raito onto a stretcher. He buckles the leather straps they have prepared, just in case Raito becomes violent or psychotic. "It's only my job," Watari says, settling down into a chair as he tends to Raito's injuries.

L watches for a moment, just breathes for a moment, and then realizes just where they are, just how serious the situation is, and moves to the front to pilot them away.

---

**A/N: People in the past have complained that the last bit is a little anticlimactic. I thought it appropriate, especially considering Asylum's sequel . . . which I will not give away at this point. But please let me know what you thought in that regard--and anything else you liked/thought I could improve.**

**And thanks very much to wonderful reviewers. You really are the ones that give me the motivate to totally neglect my calculus of multiple variable class to update these things!**

**Oh, and this is far from over. Four more chapters, I believe, plus I have more than half its sequel written. Enjoy!**

## \*Chapter 7\*: Wakened

### Chapter 07

A/N: Let's try again? Fanfiction . net wouldn't let me post this the first time around . . .

---

Everything is very bright and for a moment, Raito only stares with blank eyes at the white ceiling. He feels suspended, somehow. Things in the little room are spinning, he doesn't know if he is lying down or sitting or standing, and his eyes roll around the room, examining the walls around him as he begins to feel the beat of his blood in his stomach.

He is alive then. Damn it.

Why is he disappointed? Does he want to die?

He tries to turn his head to examine where he is further, but a blinding pain shoots down his spine and makes him twist and shiver.

What is wrong with him? God, where is he? This is some new form of imprisonment and torture?

Raito tries to twist his body, but as he moves his arm, he realizes that that hurts too, so he shifts his eyes down to examine it. An IV is lazily pumping transparent blue fluids into his veins.

Blue. Raito has only basic medical training. Blue medicine. What did that mean? Painkillers. Yes. Mood stabilizers. Used for mental patients. That too. Also anesthetic. He is in pain?

Yes, his neck hurts and his hands are throbbing with every heartbeat. What the hell is wrong with his hands? Glancing down, all he can see is that they are mostly bandaged.

What the fuck?

He tries to repeat the sentiment aloud, but no sound comes out, and he closes his mouth immediately, ashamed of the weakness. He tries humming a bit, to warm up his throat, but that hurts like hell too; the tissues in his throat must be torn. Well, shit.

Still, he manages to speak, wondering if there is anyone to hear. "What the fuck?" he mutters, the three syllables tearing at the still-healing vocal chords. He coughs, but that hurts even worse, but he can't stop now that he's started, and when it finally ends, he tries to raise a hand to wipe the tears from his eyes. His hand is stuck, though, and he slowly rolls his head over to investigate.

Straps, leather straps bind him, and he frowns at them, wondering why they would be there, what they're for?

Mental patients get these. Raito's head hurts and he feels like shit, but he knows what he is, and it's not a mental patient. *I'm Yagami Raito, from Japan. Today is . . .*

*Shit, what's today?*

*How old am I?*

*Where am I?*

*Who am I with?*

*Why am I here?*

*What is the last thing I can remember?*

Raito decides to start there and he strains his mind, thinking back across black and red spots in his mind, skimming automatically, unconsciously. He remembers being a child, remembers his parents and his sister. Sayu. Soichiro. Sachiko. He remembers high school. Sort of. University?

*I got into To-Oh. Right? Yes, I remember the red gates, some of the classes. What classes?*

*Law, psychology.*

*Did I graduate?*

He continues trying to piece his mind together, ignoring, for the time being, that this should be automatic, that he should just be able to remember without thinking about it.

*Where's my family now? What about friends?*

*Friends . . .*

*Ryuzaki . . . who the hell . . .*

*L.*

His eyes widen as he remembers that detail, as the memories of L come back in small pieces, and he thrashes around in his mind for more, looking for more of the puzzle, trying to figure out why he's so angry with L.

*Does it have something to do with why I'm here? Did L put me here? Why would L put me in a hospital?*

*We used to fight. Bastard. If he put me in the hospital, I'll kill him.*

Raito is startled with how pleased the thought of killing L sounds to him, and he flinches as he remembers the taste of blood on his tongue at the same moment.

*Whose blood? Not L's, why would I bite him, of all people?*

*My blood. Why mine?*

His thoughts are interrupted as the door in the little room swings open and L himself walks in. Raito's eyes watch him and he suddenly feels feral and predatory and he doesn't know why but the fear and uncertainty only make him feel angrier and colder.

"Raito-kun has finally woken up," L says.

His voice jolts Raito, and he flinches without knowing why. This is terrifying, not knowing his own mind, but he keeps thinking, keeps trying to figure it out. "How long was I asleep?" he asks.

L is surprised; Raito knows that probably no one else would notice, but he can tell by L's miniscule facial expressions what he is feeling. *(Why are we so close? How do I know him so well?)*

"A little over two weeks," L tells him. "Raito-kun slipped into a coma."

"Why?"

L doesn't respond, just gazes at him while he gnaws on his thumb. Raito is irritated at him, which is nothing new.

"L?" he prompts.

"If Raito-kun doesn't remember, I think perhaps it would be wise to let him sort out his own mind," L finally says, letting his hand fall to his side.

*What happened, was it serious? It hurt, I remember pain . . .*

*Just pain. That's all.*

"What does Raito-kun remember?" L asks, as if reading his mind.

"Just pain," Raito says before he can think better of his answer. Suddenly remembering his earlier questions, he asks, "What is today?"

L's eyes watch the ceiling as he thinks about whether or not to answer. "Today is the 23rd of November," he says.

November . . . Raito remembers the first part of November. It was rainy and miserable. He had been miserable. Why?

"2009," L adds.

Raito stares at him. "Beg pardon?" he finally says, his voice a little higher than what he perhaps would have liked.

"It is November 23rd, 2009," L says. "What is the last day Raito-kun remembers?"

"November . . . November something. 2004."

"Intriguing."

"Shut up, L. What the hell is going on?"

"I am not certain," L says, stepping closer to Raito. "It is obviously some sort of trauma-induced amnesia, which is not uncommon, especially considering the harrowing experience Raito-kun has been through."

Raito raises an eyebrow, and he is puzzled by the pleased expression on L's face. "Harrowing experience?" he quotes.

L frowns. "I do not have extensive medical training, but I do believe that it is best if Raito-kun remembers on his own time."

Raito grimaces in response. "Will you tell me what I'm doing in a hospital?" he asks.

"Recovering," L deadpans.

"You're hilarious," Raito snaps. He's irritated with L now, his eyes narrow and frustrated, and the emotions feel so ordinary and almost comforting that it confuses him.

"I was not attempting to make a joke," L informs him. "Raito-kun is in the hospital, being treated for various abrasions and scars, not to mention two botched and improvised surgeries."

"Surgeries," Raito mutters. The word flashes in his mind like lightning, illuminating frightening memories that he hopes to God aren't his for just a moment before they're gone again.

L is very close to him, his hand extended as though he isn't certain whether or not he should touch him. "What does Raito-kun remember?" he asks gently.

Raito feels very cold suddenly; he wants to curl up, protect himself, but from what he doesn't know, he can't remember. "I don't know," he says distantly. "Why can't I remember? Five years . . . it's a lot to forget. I remember . . . I remember it hurt."

He pauses. Yes, and that's mostly all he can remember. Pain, everywhere. Every moment. Even now, he sort of hurts. "Where was the pain coming from?" he murmurs, not really speaking to L. Suddenly, he feels L's hand on his hair, touching him gently, and that feels right, it feels good. He glances up, meeting L's eyes. "Why am I strapped down?" he asks.

"We were afraid that Raito-kun might hurt himself or a member of his treatment team," L murmurs.

The care L is taking with his words frightens Raito further, and he thinks that if it weren't for L's fingers, still gently stroking his hair, he would be shivering. The contact seems to warm him some. "Treatment team?" Raito repeats.

L nods. "I have attempted to limit the number of doctors Raito comes into contact with, more to keep his condition clandestine than anything else," he says. "But I have two of my specialists working with Raito-kun, as well as a nurse."

"What kind of specialists?" Raito asks, his eyes narrowing suspiciously.

"Dr. Cassar, who is a nerve specialist, and Dr. Toledano, who focuses on cognitive disruption."

"A doctor for pain and a psychiatrist?" Light clarifies, seeming confused still.

"They are more specialized than that, but essentially, yes."

There was a moment of silence while Raito tried to process this. Finally, his tired eyes meet L's cautious ones. "Will you just tell me what's going on?" he asks.

L's other hand is at his mouth, and he bites softly on his thumb as he considers. "May I do something first?" he asks. "I do not know how Raito-kun will react when he recovers his memories, and there is something I must say."

"Okay, tell me."

But L doesn't speak. Instead, he leans down and brushes dry lips against Raito's cheek. Raito pulls back, surprised, but not repulsed, surprised that he is not repulsed, remembering but not quite recalling entirely . . . he liked this, likes this, it is comforting, not familiar, but he wishes that it were . . .

L's face is still near to his, so he can feel the gentle exhalation of breath as he says, "I need to apologize."

Raito turns his head so that his eyes are only inches away from L's. He wonders when this became an intimate conversation. He's strapped to a hospital bed, medicine being pumped into his arm, his whole body aching, and L just *kissed* his cheek. And he wants him to do it again. "For what?" he asks.

"For . . . what I did to Raito-kun, albeit inadvertently," L says, and Raito's brow furrows in incomprehension. "I did not know what sort of treatment he was being subjected to. If I had, I would have secured his release sooner. But it was terrible, I can see that. And for the role I played, I am sorry."

Raito only watches him with blank eyes. "God, L, you are making even less sense than usual," he finally says. "First you kiss me, and I have no idea why I liked it, and now you're apologizing to me for something that I can't remember."

"Raito-kun is acting every inch a teenager," L says, looking dazed. He straightens and looks down at Raito from a higher position. "And while it is refreshing to have a

"Are you so certain, Mail, that he will recover?" L asks softly.

Matt hesitates before he answers. "Frankly, yes," he finally admits. "I'm no doctor, and I don't know him as well as you, but I know *people*." He pauses to bite down momentarily on the cigarette that he knows he can't smoke. "That's the only thing I've ever beat Mello or Near in, you know," he says casually. "I'm not competitive like they are, but it's never something I've had to work at."

"I've seen the test scores," L comments. "You did very well in emotional responses and analysis."

Matt shrugs. "I did very well in everything," he says, and there is no pride in the statement. L does notice how Matt's voice is just a notch lower now that when he is speaking to Mello. It's less emotional now, and a bit more mature sounding. Fascinating. "I just didn't do as well as Mello or Near." He pauses, frowning. "But I didn't mean to get so off-topic. What I was trying to say was, if there is anything I understand in my line of work, it's the people I interact with. Genii especially."

"Do you feel you understand me?" L asks curiously.

Matt regards him, his eyes soft and unguarded in their inquisitive and analyzing gaze. "Yes," he says finally. "Not as well as people I've interacted with more. Not as well as Near, or Mello, but no one understands Near or Mello the way I do."

"And you believe that you can understand Light Yagami, after a few short moments of interaction?" L asks.

"That, and the videos, the files, what you've told us, and his criminal history," Matt says. There is a long, comfortable pause, then Matt says, "He reminds me of Mello a bit."

"How so?" L's head is cocked to the side slightly, regarding Matt.

"Mello was like Light when he first came to Wammy's," Matt explains, biting down on the filter of his cigarette and making a face. "Scared, twisted, remembering mostly just pain. He was eight when he got there, which was a lot older than most kids. It was up in the air a while, if they were going to keep him."

"I remember," L says. Mello had been a terror in the first month or two at Wammy's. He'd lost his only family, his older brother, in a murder he'd been forced to watch, and then had been kidnapped. No one really noticed that he was gone until he'd shown up at a police station nearly a thousand miles and three countries away from his first home three or four months later. He'd been emaciated and terrified, and the police had some trouble getting a name from him.

When he'd been sent to Wammy's, Mello hadn't adjusted well to being around peers. He was fiercely independent, but he also needed acceptance and understanding. He was violent and cruel well beyond his meager eight years, and at the same time he could not hide what he was feeling—and that included pain as well as anger.

"What happened?" L asks curiously.

"Mello made me curious," Matt says. "I'm not taking all the credit for keeping him sane, but . . ."

"But you are," L finishes. "And Mello knows it, does he not?"

Matt nods slowly. "He'd probably get all pissy if he knew I'm telling you all this." His voice holds no trace of fear, but he frowns slightly, thinking. "No, he wouldn't," Matt decides. "Because it's you."

"Me?" L asks. "What do I mean to Mello?"

Matt smiles. "I gave him sanity and stability," he says. "Loyalty. You gave him purpose, something to work towards."

"I see."

"I know this isn't nearly the same case," Matt says, changing tracks. "Not even close. But their temperaments . . . they're eerily similar. Light had a good childhood, though. That will help. That's what I think he needs, though. Someone sane, someone stable."

"And you think I meet those qualifications?" L asks, quirked an eyebrow.

"Yes," Matt says, completely seriously. "He trusts you, which is the most important thing."

"Why should he trust me? I sent him there."

"But you also saved him, and you didn't have to," Matt points out. "You could have left him to rot. You've shown him that, when he confides in you, things change, things get better. And he trusts you because he knows you're smart, he believes that you're more intelligent than he is."

"I don't know that he is correct," L murmurs.

"It doesn't matter, at this point," Matt says. "It matters what he thinks. And what he thinks is that you can be trusted, that you are someone that will support him."

"I've betrayed his wishes before."

"Explain it to him," Matt suggested. "You have to be open. Someone like Light—if we're working under the assumption that he is like Mello, which he is—knows lies when he sees them, and they hurt him."

"My relationship with Light has been built on secrets in the past," L says speculatively.

"I would suggest you change it," Matt tells him. "But that's just my opinion. I'd encourage him to ask questions, to get reacquainted with you and the rest of the world. He's been isolated for so long that he will probably want information." He pauses and then, seeing the expression on L's face, adds, "I'm making it sound so simple. But it's not. It won't be easy, L. But if it works, then you'll be glad you did it."

L is still for a moment, processing Matt's advice. It is sound, if a bit terrifying. He doesn't know that it is safe to be open and honest with someone of Light's instability, but it sounds as though it could be more damaging to continue the closed relationship they'd operated under previously. "Mello," L says slowly. "He is not . . . entirely stable now."

"You'd be surprised," Matt says, smiling a little. "He can control himself, when he needs to, when he thinks he ought to. He just rarely feels that he does. Like when Light was trying to strangle him back at the asylum. He had his gun pressed to his chest, but he didn't fire it. That's an impressive feat for him. And when you mentioned that we needed to be unconscious, it scared him, but he didn't do anything then either."

L nods, remembering. "I noticed his uneasiness and though it would be prudent to clarify before he became truly upset."

"He never gets too upset with you," Matt says. "I just take precautions."

"I don't know that I deserve his faith," L murmurs.

Matt smiles and stands. "You do," he says. "And even if you didn't, you have it, so try not to break it."

"Are we speaking of Light or Mello at this point?" L asks, standing as well.

"Both," Matt says. "And me," he adds, as an afterthought.

L regards him with wide eyes. "Thank you," he says finally, and is rewarded with a wide grin. How strange, L thinks, that Matt should be so socially proficient (*just like Light*), when the rest of the Wammy students were generally stunted in that area. He remembers Matt's own past, and he thinks to ask, "Why did you choose Mello? What did he do to earn your loyalty?"

Matt has to think about that one, his gentle face becoming open as he considers it. "Because he made me curious, at first," he says. "I told you that earlier. I've always thought of people sort of as knots, and I like to pull them apart and pick at them until I have everything in order. Mello was a challenge to me at first. And then . . . you saw him earlier."

He has passion. He can make the denizens of the underworld follow him. Mello decided that he wanted me, that he liked me, so I wasn't going to argue. He was the first one that I had found interesting that had wanted me too. And it sort of grew from there; now, we're so tangled in each other's lives that I couldn't untangle the knot if I wanted to. Not that I want to." He smiles at L, obviously amused by his own mixed metaphors.

L smiles back. "I am grateful for your advice," he says. "And for your assistance. Is there any compensation I can offer?"

Matt is shaking his head before L can answer. "No," he says. "But if you'd like, you can owe us a favor."

L nods. "I will not forget."

Matt's expression become lighter, his stance easier and less serious suddenly, and L looks over his shoulder to see Mello approaching them both.

"Where've you been?" he asks Matt.

Matt looks at him seriously, the easy smile gone from his face. He gestures towards L. "We were talking about Light."

Mello glances at L and the door he's standing in front of. "We've got to get going—stuff's come up," he tells him, and Matt nods.

"Our stuff's already packed up," Matt says.

Mello nods, taking Matt's preparations for granted, as usual.

L interrupts, stepping forward. "I was just thanking Matt for his assistance," he says. "And I must thank you as well, Mello. I am quite grateful for your considerable skills of disruption. Without your support, I would have been unable to carry out this operation."

Mello smiles, his lips barely quirked up, and that's how Matt knows that it's genuine; when Mello is feeling insecure or angry or especially cruel, he smiles then, but it's wide and closed. Now, his eyes turn up a little, and Matt can see how pleased he is to hear praise from L. "No problem," he says.

Matt smiles too, and is only a little bit jealous of how freely Mello gives L these little expressions and how easily he drops his guard whenever he's around.

Mello looks at him. "You ready?" he asks. "We better go."

Matt pushes off of the wall he was leaning on. "Kay," he says. He looks at L. "See you," he says.

"Let us know if you have anything else fun to do," Mello says, sounding, like he always does around L, more like the child he once was.

L nods, and watches as Mello starts down the passageway, with Matt barely a half-step behind him. But still a bit behind. He supposes that it wouldn't do for Mello to know that Matt is every inch his equal.

He watches them until they disappear around the corner, and then sighs and glances back into Light's room. He is still sleeping, his thin face not even relaxed in unconsciousness. L stares at him for a moment before withdrawing and walking up the ward toward the office of Light's doctors. In light of all that Matt had told him, they were going to need a new recovery plan for Light.

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A/N: You know, I remember when I was writing this originally, I really, really wanted to give Light amnesia forever. Just . . . have him forget everything horrible, let him work on all the physical problems (ankles, hands, nerve damage, etc.) before anything else. Then, eventually, maybe he'd start remembering things bit by bit, and dealing with them as they came.

But. Life doesn't work like that. It attacks you all at once, and you either have to deal or buckle under its weight. Luckily for Light, he has L there to help him deal, though sometimes it's going to be too much—but you'll see what I mean in future chapters.

Anyways, just three more chapters of this, you guys, and then a sequel that I think is going to be about 12 chapters! (I already have quite a few written. Eight, maybe?)

Please let me know if you liked it, or if there's anything I could work on! Thanks for reading!

## \*Chapter 8\*: Aftermath

Part 08

Edited and Reposted as of 9.27.09

Warning: More gore in this chapter--not terribly graphic, but it will feature self-harm and other injury.

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It smells like sunshine and clean air; Raito inhales deeply, letting out the air in a rush before he opens his eyes.

It is another small room, and his eyes narrow in suspicion. Although it is made to look like a bedroom, Raito can detect subtle signs of medical care, not the least of which is the IV still taped to his arm.

*God, what now?* is all he can think. It's always one thing after another, isn't it?

Raito starts to raise his arm that is throbbing slightly with the pressure of the needle, but he is still restrained by soft straps that encircle his torso and forearms. *Shit.* Is he still back at the asylum? Had all this been a dream a nightmare spinning in circles—no it couldn't be a dream, it hurt too much when he saw L

but his dreams always hurt anyway

he hates sleep

where is L?

*Where is he? If it really happened, wouldn't he be here? Shouldn't he be here? Fuck . . . this hurts . . . ankles, my arms, what is this IV doing*

*what am I doing here? Why does everything have to hurt . . .*

*L . . .*

*hate him kill him just get rid of him*

*no I need him*

*I hate him*

*he came back he got me out of the asylum*

*he sent me there in the first place, he's a heartless bastard*

*he just doesn't like someone else playing games with me*

*why did he send me there?*

*. . . Kira . . . L says I'm Kira . . .*

*Not. I'm not. No memories.*

*He says I forgot. Bastard, fucking bastard! How could I forget something like that? I hate him!*

*I need him.*

*and . . . from so long ago, from a lifetime ago, back when things were smoother and not everything had to hurt all over . . . I want him . . . wanted him . . .*

Raito starts when the door swings open noiselessly and L shuffles in, carelessly leaving the door open. Without any permission from his own mind, Raito's lips twitch upwards into a manic smile, and the words *you can either laugh or cry* start echoing in his mind.

L walks over to him without even glancing to see if he is awake, and he checks the level of fluids in the IV. He nods, apparently satisfied, before he turns to Raito.

"How is Raito-kun feeling?" he asks.

Raito searches for some semblance of emotion, but all he feels now is harsh, awful laughter like splinters under his skin . . .

He swallows the laughter. "Where are we?"

"My summer home in England," L says.

"Why?"

"We felt that Raito-kun would recover more fully in a more peaceful environment," L tells him.

"Why does everything still hurt?" Raito finally asks.

"We have taken Raito-kun off of his intravenous painkillers," L says softly.

"Why?" It seems that this is the only word he's capable of saying—and he can think of dozens of other questions, but nothing more will come out. Only: *why?*

That's what he's been wondering all along.

"We need to know the extent of the damage to Raito-kun's nerves," is L's answer.

Raito stares at him for a moment. Everything suddenly seems to be too much, things are happening too fast, they're expecting him to recover, to be well again, but he has forgotten all about what it was like not to hurt, not to feel pain all the time, all over.

His body convulses, and it feels almost like laughter, what he is doing, but it isn't, this isn't laughter, he's not laughing. It's only when he feels the wetness on his face that he realizes that he is sobbing, and he is humiliated, L has never seen him cry before.

And L is staring at him as though he doesn't know quite what to do, and his confused and guilty expression is just so damn funny that Raito starts to laugh, but that makes him cry more.

He's not stopping, he can't feel the end of these sobs that are wracking his too-thin frame, his convulsing making the needle in his arm dig in unpleasantly, and he cries out louder at that, god, it's just more pain, why why *why* does he have to have all this? He is suddenly aware that he's speaking it too, not just thinking it—his voice is now a hoarse, trembling litany of *whys*, and he mumbles it as L moves closer to him, trying to help.

He is aware also of L's fingertips in his hair, gently stroking, and he can hear, as though from a distance, L speaking to him. He doesn't answer, because he can't quite hear, and

then he can feel the pressure of the restraints on his arms and torso loosen and he only shivers harder. He can feel, along with L's fingers in his hair, the more concrete sensation of L sitting next to him, of L gingerly putting one arm around him in what has to be the most awkward hug in the history of the earth.

Raito accepts it though; he doesn't have any other choice; he just hurts and this small contact helps a little. He turns his head so that it rests in the gentle curve of L's shoulder and loses himself in the emotion until finally . . . finally . . .

he is still.

---

Time passes. One week, two weeks. Then three. Raito is angry, furious that he can't walk, that L won't let him out of his sight. He is weak and he knows it and it kills him.

And everything still hurts.

L sets down a rather large-looking dinner in front of Raito.

Raito doesn't look up from the book he's been devouring obsessively. Anything from the outside world, any stimulus that doesn't involve his own nervous system, is good for him. "No," he says.

"Raito-kun must eat," L says.

Raito's eyes are fixed on the book and he shakes as he tries to stay in control. "No," he repeats, louder.

"If Raito-kun insists on turning this into an argument, I assure him that I am having none of it," L says shortly. "If he will not eat, he will be put on a feeding tube."

Raito slams the book shut. "Fuck you," he growls.

"I am sorry," L says. "But you must eat."

"You're not sorry," Raito says. "Not about that." He pauses, and takes a savage bite. "Not about anything."

L's eyes are wide as he says, "I do not think Raito-kun will ever fully understand the anguish I feel whenever I see him."

Raito stops eating and stares back, his own face twisted into a sneer as he listens, not believing a word of it.

L can see the hard mistrust etched into his features, and he continues. "I understand why Raito-kun would be disinclined to believe me. But I must tell him how I am deeply sorry. I have never felt so guilty and tormented about a decision as I do over this. I should have respected Raito-kun's wishes. Or I should have been more vigilant in my watch over Dr. Crowley."

Raito winces as Crowley worms his way into the conversation. "Bullshit," he says, his voice too loud for the little room they're in.

L notes that, at least today, Raito is able to make conversation. There have been some days where all he seems to be is a shell filled with too many dark memories. All Raito is able to do on those days is just remember and hurt all over again, and L will force himself to stay and watch, first because he knows that Raito wants him there, and also because even though it terrifies him, L knows that there is no punishment harsh enough for what he has done to Raito.

The least he can do is watch.

"Raito-kun, please," L says. "I do not ask for your forgiveness." Raito's mouth is a hard line as he fights the laughter and the urge to just *scream*. "I only want to do all that I can to alleviate the harm I have done."

Raito doesn't respond; his eyes are elsewhere, and he is shivering, and L doesn't know if he's even heard what he had to say.

---

Time passes. Things seem . . . surprisingly consistent.

Three months after being forcibly broken out of Crowley's Institution, Raito seems no better or worse than when L had seen him the first time.

The first two were a perfect sort of hell. Raito, as it turned out, had no sleep schedule. He admitted that he had not slept normally since entering the asylum, and it appeared that he had just stolen sleep whenever he wasn't being tortured or questioned or feeling especially frightened.

They had since found a medication, a mood stabilizer of sorts, that was able to combat many of his mood swings and managed to stabilize his sleep schedule.

And now it has been three months of night terrors and shivering during the day; three months of hearing Raito scream when he doesn't want to; three months of both Raito and L becoming shorter and shorter with one another as they continue to tentatively work out a new way of living. Raito has yet to be able to walk by himself, and while they are working on a series of exercises that will allow him partial mobility, progress is slow, frustrating, and most of all, painful.

Raito feels very tired.

L can see that when he wakes up around three in the morning. He often sleeps in the same room as Raito, in an armchair nearby, in case he is needed. He often is, and Raito has even admitted, in his brief moments of clarity, that he wants L there.

L opens his eyes and scan the dimly lit room.

His eyes meet with Raito's, and L starts a little. Raito will generally sleep through the night, particularly in the past month.

So L is surprised when Raito's eyes are steady on his own, and he asks if Raito needs anything.

Slowly, Raito shakes his head. "No," he says. His voice is gentle, and L wonders what he is thinking.

"How is Raito-kun feeling?" L asks.

"Calm," Raito says clinically. "Those drugs make me feel like I'm floating."

"Perhaps the dosage is too high," L speculates, but Raito shakes his head.

"I don't mind," he says. "It's a relief, more often than not."

"Why is Raito-kun awake?" L asks.

Raito shrugs, a gesture so normal that L frowns in surprise. Raito has not seemed this sane since he woke up without his memories in the hospital. "I don't know," he says. "I just woke up and I wasn't tired anymore."

"Raito-kun looks tired," L points out.

"I look like hell, is what I look like," Raito murmurs, and L smiles at the brief flash of Raito's once-vain personality.

"No one expects Raito-kun to be able to take care of his appearance as meticulously as he once did," L says.

Raito sighs softly. "I think that's why I've been having problems . . . adjusting," he says.

"What's that?" L asks.

"I keep trying to be what I was," Raito clarifies. "And also because half the time I'm in so much pain I don't remember that I've left the asylum. But the rest of the time, I'm so angry that I've lost control, that I'm helpless like this. Fuck, L, I can't even walk!" He pauses to take a breath. "But I'm not the same person anymore. I can't ever be."

"That makes me sad to hear," L says softly.

"It makes me tired," Raito says. "Don't you think it would be easier, just to give me what I want?"

"Death?" L asks, used to this morbid topic.

"Yes," Raito says. "Please. All you'd have to do would be to leave me unattended for two minutes."

L's eyes are hard as he answers. "Out of the question," he says, and he notices the old flash of anger in Raito's eyes before it is doused by the stabilizing drugs and he eventually slips back into sleep.

---

Time passes. Three months turn to four.

Raito is learning new tasks to occupy his mind, like learning how to write middle high German cursive, and he looks up from the elegant writing his scarred hand is tracing one day, and glances at L, who is occupying himself solving trivial crimes as quickly as he can manage.

L is immediately aware of Raito's eyes on him, but he continues in his activities—his best record for solving a cold case is twenty-two minutes, and he's trying to break it.

"I don't know what to do with you," Raito says.

L looks up at him and then cocks his head to the side. The question's in his eyes, and Raito just shrugs.

"I don't like you," he says, as though that explains anything.

"Raito-kun's dislike of my qualities is well-known to me," L says indifferently.

"I don't like you," Raito repeats, fixing L with a glare for a moment before he sighs and leans back in his chair. "But I need you," he finishes.

L hesitates for a moment before responding. "I'm flattered," he finally murmurs, before returning to his work.

"I wish I didn't," Raito mutters, almost inaudibly, before going back to his writing.

---

Time passes.

"How is Raito-kun feeling?" L asks. He always asks, first thing in the mornings, before breakfast.

Raito looks up at him through eyelids still heavy with sleep and drugs. "Tired," he says.

L hesitates—he knows he shouldn't, but Raito looks so . . . sad. Then he leans in and just brushes his lips against Raito's cheek.

Raito holds very still for a moment, then slowly, he turns his head so that suddenly it isn't L's lips on his cheek; it's Raito's lips on his.

They are both motionless for a moment, then Raito gently reaches up and places thin, cool fingers on L's cheek, and so L mirrors the motion, figuring that if Raito does it to him, then it's okay to do it back.

It is so gentle at first, so L is surprised when suddenly they are moving, Raito's mouth open and coaxing L's tongue into his own mouth. L stifles a moan at the strange feeling of Raito's tongue stroking along his, and the feel of Raito's hot mouth on his, sucking, and Raito's hands moving to his hair. L's hands are gentle still, stroking his face and scalp in motions that are more soothing than anything else. L can feel, rather than hear, the soft sounds Raito is making in his throat, deep, pleased noises, and it makes L want him more, want this more . . .

And god, L knows that it's probably wrong, and that Raito probably isn't in his right mind. But feeling this—the passion Raito once had, that he still has, somewhere, buried under pain and dark experiences—makes L realize that, right or wrong, he doesn't care.

---

Time passes.

Raito wakes up one morning and realizes that it's been nearly five months since L broke him out of Crowley's Institute.

He doesn't stop shivering all day, and when L tries to make him talk, he feels like screaming, and so he does.

Because it just *hurts*, all over, and it would just be too damn hard to explain it to L—to explain how it's been five fucking months, and how he feels no better.

---

Time passes. Six months: gone.

L is cooking, a skill he has picked up because Raito seems to enjoy watching him.

Raito is standing next to him, his fingers dancing lightly on the countertop.

L shifts the pan to turn the stir fry he is cooking, and then suddenly he is jumping back, shouting in alarm, cringing, and turning around just in time to see Raito putting the metal spatula he was holding back down on the counter.

L stares at him in disbelief before his eyes flicker down to the exposed skin of his forearm, which is already starting to blister from where Raito had pressed the heated spatula to it.

There is no malice in Raito's eyes, only determination and perhaps even a spark of amusement, and L doesn't bother asking what the hell he was thinking; he just drags them both over to the sink where he runs cold water over the irritated area.

"Hurts like a bitch, doesn't it?" Raito asks. His voice would be conversational, if it weren't so damn smug.

"Yes," L says shortly.

"The metal Crowley used was a lot hotter, though," Raito says speculatively.

"That was some petty revenge, then?" L asks.

Raito laughs, even though he knows that L hates it. Or perhaps because he knows. "No," he says, when he can breathe. "I thought you might be interested in a small taste of the pain I experienced. I wouldn't dream of revenge, L. You won. The game's over."

"Perhaps we're in a new game."

"We're always playing," Raito says, smiling.

"What are we playing *for*?" L asks.

Raito shrugs. "Whatever we have left," he says.

---

Time passes. Seven months.

"It isn't . . . fair."

L looks up and over at Raito, who seems to be struggling with his words. His lips are twisted downwards into a frown as he stares at the ground intently, as though he's speaking to the carpet, not L.

"Fair?" L repeats, the word tasting strange on his tongue.

"Fair," Raito says again, nodding once. "It isn't."

"What, this?" L asks, glancing at the case he's been working on.

"No. Well, yes. That too. But I meant . . ." Raito finally raises his head and L is startled to see his desperate expression and the brightness in his eyes. "It isn't fair," he says again, voice reduced to a whisper as he tries to keep it from breaking.

L feels his heart sinking, breaking, as he reaches forward and Raito jerks away from him. He can see the struggle—the desperate need for comfort and the pride that has kept him alive so far warring for dominance. "Oh, Raito," he murmurs, and Raito looks away from him again.

"Do you think it gets better?" Raito's voice is pitched low now, and he's turned completely away from L.

L frowns; he needs an expression, he needs some kind of visual indicator. Even with the trembling shoulders he can see, the voice still isn't enough. He approaches Raito again and this time the younger man does not move away from him again.

"Raito," he says again. Raito turns his head and presses it hard into his shoulder as L slides his arms around hm. These embraces still feel impossibly awkward to L, but he's reconciled himself to the idea since Raito needs them so badly. "They have to," he finally murmurs.

Raito's laughter is unlike his usual fair of self-mocking, breathless laughter. It's more of an ironic, low-pitched and hollow sound, and L tightens his grip on Raito when he hears it.

"No," Raito tells him. "I've learned that. Things *don't* have to get better, L. They can stay the same. They can get worse. But there is no force that recognizes when you've had enough—when you've hit bottom and now things have to get better because things can't get any worse." He pauses and gasps for breath a moment while L struggles to find something to say to that. "It turns out there's a basement, and a cellar, and all kinds of levels of hell after you hit rock bottom. Things can *always* get worse."

One of the longest pauses of L's life follows Raito's cheering words, and he feels like it's all he can do to just keep hanging onto Raito as tightly as possible. He rests his chin on Raito's shoulder as he stares out the window; the glaring sunlight is burning his eyes, but he feels like if he shuts them, Raito will disappear and he won't find him again.

What he finally does manage to say is this: "You're right, it could be worse; it could be raining."

Raito laughs at that until he's crying again, and even L manages a feeble smile.

---

Time passes.

Matt shows up unexpectedly on the third week of the eighth month, grinning as he strolls through the door. L notices that Raito's eyes are wary as he watches Matt, and L knows that he remembers.

"Hey, L," Matt says, sitting without being asked.

"Matt, I was unaware that you would be joining me here."

"It'll only be for about a day or two," Matt says, his eyes shifting as he calculates. "No more than two days."

"Mello is angry with you?" L guesses.

Matt looks confused for a moment. "Oh," he says, "no. Mello and Near have to work together for a case—they were both contacted for it and each has information the other wants."

"I am confused," L says. "What does that have to do with being here?"

"Do you really think that I value my sanity so little that I would choose to be in the same room as those two?" Matt asks. "Besides, I need some time to set up a computer system, and I wouldn't get any free time around them."

"Ah," L says. "Very well, then."

Matt's eyes turn to Raito, who is examining him carefully from his position in a computer chair. L has recently been trying to turn his mind to more logical pursuits, like solving some of the cold cases various agencies ask L to look at. L screens the cases carefully before handing them to Raito, and he makes certain that he is always near when Raito is working, in case the stress should prove to be too much. L only recently allowed him to look at any pictures containing gore, and since it did not appear to have any adverse affect on him, he has given him more cases. Raito seems to have taken to it, however, and his condition has been slowly improving as he works.

Now, Raito has lowered the files he was previously examining. His leg is bouncing nervously, but his hands are still, so L is not worried yet.

Matt watches him back for a moment, gauging his reaction, L supposes, before he grins. "Hey," he says. "You look better."

L is startled by Matt's words, and he turns to look at Raito as well. He supposes that he must, at least externally. Raito's diet has helped him gain back the weight that slipped off of him in the asylum, and the hours during the week L forces them both to spend outside have helped him immensely. Only his eyes are the same as they were in the asylum, and that is what worries L. Raito's eyes are dark and blank most days, and L knows that behind them he is generally fighting the urge to laugh or scream or just cry.

Raito says nothing in response to Matt's comment for a long moment. Then, after struggling for several seconds to remember the manners and rules of social interaction he used to find so simple to obey, he nods. "Thank you," he says. His eyes don't move from Matt's still, and so Matt shrugs complacently and pulls out a mini laptop.

Raito studies him for a moment more before his eyes flicker over to L, whose own eyes have not left Raito for the entire exchange. His eyes are questioning, and L moves closer to him.

"I don't suppose I ever introduced Raito-kun to Matt, not formally," L says. He gestures to Matt, who glances up from his hacking. "He assisted in your escape," L adds.

"I remember," Raito says, his voice deadpan. He goes back to looking at Matt. "You had the taser," he says.

Matt nods, lighting up a cigarette, which is promptly plucked from him fingers by L. "If you wish to smoke," L says, "you will kindly do so outside."

Matt makes a grab for his cigarette, but L is taller, so finally Matt just shrugs and heads out to the balcony to smoke in peace.

Raito, shivering slightly in the crisp fall air, joins him a few moments later. Matt doesn't speak until Raito is standing next to him, and then he turns his head to look at him sideways.

"Hey," he says. He holds out the carton of cigarettes. "Want one?"

Raito plucks a cigarette out and rolls it between his slim, scarred fingers, but he doesn't ask for a light; when Matt flicks the lighter in an offer, Raito winces slightly and shakes his head.

"I don't smoke," he says, examining the cigarette in his hand. "I just like to have something to do with my hands."

Matt nods, he can understand that.

"You switched off the simulation charge," Raito says, as though continuing a conversation.

"Yeah," Matt says. "I didn't have much experience with them, but technology is my strong suit."

"That's what L says," Raito comments.

"Does he talk about us?" Matt asks. He notices that Raito is trembling and he sits down on one of the chairs. Raito follows suit, tucking his feet underneath his body. "Your ankles still hurt?" Matt asks.

Raito nods slowly. "I can stand," he says, shrugging. "It's everything else that hurts. I can walk for short periods of time." He starts picking at the white papers surrounding the rest of the cigarette, and Matt watches as he begins to pick it apart. "I can't run, though. We thought swimming might be good exercise, but that hurts like hell, too. Something about how you have to point your feet to kick effectively."

Matt nods. "That sucks," he says. His tone is easy, and Raito looks at him curiously, his lips twitching.

"How old are you?" he asks.

"Nineteen," Matt says.

"You act younger," Raito says.

Matt shrugs. "Sometimes," he says. "Depends."

"On what?"

"Who I'm around."

"And around me, you act younger?"

"I think it seemed like it would be less threatening to you."

Raito takes a moment to process this. "Hmm," he says. There is a moment of silence, then he answers Matt's much earlier question. "Yes, L talks about all of you. Not often. Mostly when he thinks that I can't hear."

Matt turns his head to one side, his eyes on the changing color of fall leaves on the trees near the balcony. "What do you mean?" he asks.

"When I'm . . . having an episode, I guess you would call it. When I don't remember where I am. I think I'm still back there. I panic."

"He talks to you then?"

Raito nods. "I think he thinks it helps calm me down. And maybe it does. I don't know. He'll . . . hold me. And talk to me. I can't understand what he's saying then, but I can after it's over."

"Do you have . . . episodes a lot?"

Raito shrugs. "It's unpredictable, really. In the . . ." He swallows, then continues. "In the asylum, it was all the time, many times a day, sometimes all day. Now . . ." He trails off and shrugs again. "It's all over the place. Some days I can't drag myself out of it. Other days . . . like today, I guess . . . everything seems almost normal."

"So things are getting better?" Matt asks.

Again, Raito shrugs. "I guess," he says. He stands and limps back inside. Matt's eyes follow him before returning to his cigarette. Even if Raito can't see it, Matt can.

He's healing. Slowly. He's still on the prescription drugs, he probably always will be. And not a day will go by that Raito won't remember and hurt because of it.

But slowly, he is getting better.

Matt nods in satisfaction. He supposes that, now that he's checked up on Raito and L, he can go back to Mello. But he's already made his excuse to L, so he supposes that he might as well stay a few days.

He taps the ash off his filter and steps back inside.

---

The first thing that suggests that something is wrong is that L can hear Raito murmuring something while he's in the bathroom. He's pacing just outside, trying to give Raito some space, trying to set up some trust like Matt had suggested; but he can barely get ten meters away before his chest seizes up and he tightens his jaw and walks back to the bathroom door and listens until he can hear Raito moving around in the shower again.

L can still hear him moving, but there is a quiet whisper now, presumably coming from Raito; and although L can't make out what is being said, he can tell that it is the same thing being murmured over and over again, like a litany, like a prayer.

He hesitates. God forgive him, but he hesitates. He wants so badly to believe in Raito, to believe that Raito is going to do right and that he's safe without L two feet away.

But he doesn't—and yet, still he stalls for a second.

Two. Three. Nearly forty seconds now. The quiet chanting is almost imperceptibly louder now. Forty-five seconds.

Oh God, he can't take this. He knocks. No variation in the noise within the shower. "Raito?" he asks.

A pause in the soft murmuring, and then it picks up again. No answer.

L enters, noticing as he does that he has to use the key, though he expressly has ordered Raito not to lock the door of any room he's occupying.

For just a split second, L's brain informs him that Raito is alive, he's standing in the glass stall of the shower, and that the noise L has been fretting over has been Raito counting over and over, the scars that adorn his body.

And then the rest of his brain launches into action and tells him that Raito is currently occupying himself with the task of reopening those scars with a thin blade gotten God-knows-where.

"Raito!" he says sharply, his words a muted scream. Raito's eyes flicker, but he doesn't really look up from his task until L is in the shower, wrestling him for the razorblade. Raito fights for it, and eventually ends up sitting on the cool tile of the shower floor as L relieves him of it and switches off the water.

They only stare at each other for a moment, L panting and looking at him like he'd like nothing more than to just start running somewhere far away from him. Raito looks a little lost, and his eyes will not be still; they keep flitting around, from L to the blade he's holding, to the window, the soapdish, the door, the showerhead, anything and everything, so fast that L's sure he's not really seeing.

L knows he needs to be moving, he needs to be bandaging Raito, fixing the dozen or so gashes he's made on his arms and hands and stomach. But all he can do, for this moment, is just stare.

Raito breaks the eye contact first, eyes rolling back and fluttering shut as he leans heavily against the glass door of the shower. He pulls his legs to his chest and shakes so hard L thinks he might actually injure himself. L takes a step forward.

"Go away," Raito mumbles.

And it's that that really breaks L's calm. He takes another step and grips Raito's shoulder hard enough that Raito flinches and tries to move away. L holds tighter.

"Go away?" He quotes, turning the simple sentence into a demand for information. "'Go away'? My God, Raito, what the hell are you doing?" He shakes Raito's shoulder a little, though he doesn't know if Raito even realizes it. His voice raises several notches. "What the *hell* do you think you're doing?"

Raito lifts his head and L can see that he's not shaking from fear or cold. Raito is *laughing*, and L recoils.

He kneels next to Raito and grips both of his shoulders. "Raito, talk to me," he says, struggling to get his voice back under control. Raito laughs harder, breath catching as he near-sobs. "*Please*, Raito," he continues quietly. "Please, it's okay, talk to me."

Raito's head lolls back against the wall of the shower and he moves it back and forth. His blood is beginning to pool on the shower floor, and L wonders if the cuts are so deep he should be concerned.

Raito pushes at his hands. "Go away L Lawliet," he tells him, each word separate and distinct from its fellows so they become miniature sentences with a sing-song pattern.

L doesn't go away. "Raito, don't do this," he urges quietly. "Come on, come back and we'll bandage these together."

"Come back?" Raito quotes. He begins laughing again. "I'm right here, L Lawliet. I'm not going anywhere."

"Come back down," L clarifies. "Come back to normal."

Raito gives him an unstable grin. "Normal," he repeats, sounding like he's tasting the word. like he's never heard it before. "Normal, normal, normal, what's normal? This is normal, L Lawliet."

L decides he's done screwing around and he stands, heaving Raito to his feet, ignoring how he squirms and struggles and tries to get away. L tosses the razorblade on the floor of the shower and bodily drags Raito into their bedroom. He practically throws him onto the bed and fixes him with the best glare he can muster under the circumstances. He's composed externally, but on the inside he's positively trembling.

This is unlike Raito's other episodes. He's talking, for one thing, and he knows where he is and who L is. L wonders if this is better or worse.

L begins the lengthy process of bandaging wounds. He winces as he cleans the blood off of one and realizes that Raito needs stitches.

His voice is low when he announces, "You're an idiot. Why the hell did you do that?"

For now, Raito is being compliant and he just grins at L, not even wincing at the rubbing alcohol that's being poured on his injuries. "I hate you," he says sweetly.

Suddenly it's too much for L and he throws the dressing he's been using on the bed. His temper doesn't often get the better of him, but these are special circumstances. "You know what?" he demands. "Fix your own damn self. I'm done, Raito. Are you listening? Are you sane enough to comprehend that? Things are going to have to change because it's been a whole year and I *cannot do this right now.*"

Raito's face does a complete 180 and he suddenly looks very solemn and catches L's sleeve as he tries to get out of there. He blinks like he's coming out of something, and when L makes to leave again, he whispers, "Wait."

L actually contemplates it for a second, but then he sees the horrible new injuries Raito's inflicted on himself and he tries to leave again.

"Wait, please, I'm sorry," Raito breathes, holding tighter to his shirt, like he's afraid to actually touch him. "I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it, I didn't mean to."

"You didn't mean to?" L snaps, and doesn't even care when Raito flinches. "It looked pretty damn deliberate to me, Raito."

All Raito says in return is, "Wait."

L wants so badly to run right now. All his instincts are screaming at him to go, that he just cannot handle this right now. But Raito is looking at him imploringly, holding on so desperately, so with a sigh he collapses on the bed next to Raito. "What?" he asks, still speaking sharply.

"I'm sorry," Raito repeats. "I didn't mean . . . It was an anniversary, one year, you know . . . And I didn't . . ." He's floundering, looking for words that don't want to be recalled, and his fingers form fists in frustration as he tightens his jaw against the tears prickling at his eyes. He moves forward and the motion pulls at the untreated wounds on his stomach; when he reaches down and his hand comes away red, he stares in amazement.

He lifts his gaze to L, and it's like coming out of a fog, or a coma. "It hurt," he whispers. "It hurts right now. Always . . . all the time, L. I didn't know—I didn't mean to."

Raito is afraid now, because L is not relenting, his eyes are not softening, and he's so terrified that L meant it, that he is done, that he can't do it anymore because if L can't do it then neither can Raito.

"Please, L," he whispers.

And wordlessly, as though obeying a command, L reaches down and picks up the discarded dressing and finishes what he started. He says nothing, not even when he has to use butterfly tape on some of the more grisly wounds.

"I want to be better," Raito tells him at one point. L spares him an emotionless glance before continuing on with his work. Raito can feel the weight of the disappointment and anger and grief on him and it makes him want to curl up and protect himself.

L finishes and Raito expects him to take off and maybe never comes back. But he doesn't; he doesn't and it's almost worse because he does pull Raito into an embrace so hollow that it actually makes things worse.

Raito grips his shirt like he's afraid he's going to disappear. "I'm sorry, I hate this, I didn't mean anything, I'm sorry," he's mumbling. "I wasn't thinking, please . . ."

And finally, L takes a deep, shuddering breath and holds him tighter. "Raito," he murmurs. "It's okay. We're going to fix it."

"I'm sorry, I—"

"Don't talk. It's okay."

"You're mad?" He's childlike in his blind need for comfort, and L finds himself relenting, just a little.

"Yes." Though not enough to lie.

Silence.

"I didn't mean to."

"I know."

"I don't hate you."

Another deep breath. "I know."

Raito pulls away. "I'm going to keep working at it. I'm not . . . this doesn't mean I'm giving up. It's just . . . hard."

"I know." A little more emotion injected into that voice, and Raito can feel some of the tension in his chest ease.

"It's okay?" he asks.

"Yes, Raito. It's okay."

"Will you . . . will you still help me? Fix it? Work at it?"

And finally, a barely discernable smile. "Always," L says.

---

Raito's laughter is self-deprecating and breathless and cruel and L hates it.

He hates it because Raito never laughs like he used to—the soft, gentle cascade of humor that used to come when L said something clever, or when Raito himself found something amusing.

L hates it because it's not laughter at all. It's a kind of sobbing, and he and Raito both know it, but they don't really *talk* about it.

They don't talk much about anything these days, except cases and, on occasion, current events.

They don't talk much about the past and they don't talk about Raito's episodes or how he still trembles in the dark, or how L will climb into bed with him and hold him when his nightmares feel too real. And they certainly don't talk about the medication Raito takes or the flashbacks he has, or the blind flashes of rage or terror he experiences without warning, making him volatile and temperamental.

And yes, L knows that the flashbacks are less common and are shorter these days. And yes, L knows that Raito is slowly learning to control himself as he once did, and he knows that Raito depends on him, for the medicine, for breaking him out of the asylum. For holding him, for offering comfort where there is none. L knows that Raito depends on him for the short kisses in the middle of the night, nothing more, and for the challenge L still provides. For teaching him to walk again, to speak to contact to communicate again, all over again.

Yes, L knows all of this.

But so does Raito, and it kills him.

---

*"I can give you a comprehensive list of names, if you'd like," Kira said in a monotone. He was dully composed and he knew he unnerved the prosecutor. He tried not to look at his father as he continued. "I remember all of them. Their names, faces. Everything I needed to know."*

*"That won't be necessary, Yagami-kun. No further questions, your Honor."*

*The judge nodded, and the prosecutor took a seat. Raito remained sitting at the stand, waiting to be dismissed.*

*And the memory fades; nothing is crystal clear anymore, and colors blend and bleed together as Raito recalls the dull grey of his holding cell, and the nondescript tan of his prison clothes, and the red of his father's broken face, and most of all the awful blackness he could feel surrounding him, a tangible, aching anger and brokenness and he felt so lost . . .*

*He had given up everything. He lost. He lost and it had been his own doing.*

*He remembered clutching his head in his hands one night, gripping his hair tightly, murmuring "Oh god oh god oh god oh god."*

*As though there were anyone to answer.*

*And he was a murderer, and a savior, and a god, and so so human. He couldn't take it anymore, surely he would go mad with all this uncontrollable emotion, even if he was composed and dead in the courtroom, this tiny solitary cell was another matter entirely . . .*

*And L didn't come to see him, he never came.*

*Not to the cell. Not to his trial.*

*L must hate him now. Raito should have expected as much—he had expected as much. But to lose him entirely, so suddenly . . .*

*But it would all be over soon. All of this awful torment and pain and just suffering would be over and then he would be nothing.*

*Yes, nothing sounded very appealing right now.*

*Not to have to feel anything—grief or loss or failure or heartbreak, or love, the most ridiculous of all emotions*

*The one that had destroyed him. The one that was still destroying him. It wasn't even an emotion. It was a state of being—a black hole that had so much gravity that once he had fallen in, it was impossible to escape.*

*But it would all be over soon. Kira thought about that, and he could breathe. It would all be over soon, and then he would never have to think or breathe or feel again.*

*And that was why, when the day came for him to be sentenced, Kira walked into the courtroom with no apprehension, shoulders relaxed, eyes dull.*

*He didn't listen at all as they went over the courtroom formalities—he was trying to calculate how long it would be until they could execute him.*

*And Kira barely noticed when they stood up to announce the verdict. He was too immersed in himself, trying to keep the screams of agony and regret from building beyond what he could control.*

*But through all his thoughts and feelings, he heard, "Guilty." And he took a deep breath. Close now, death was so close. God, he wanted it, could taste it on his tongue . . .*

*The judge was speaking, delivering his sentence.*

*Oh god oh god oh god oh god just breathe. He couldn't say it out loud, but he felt the words pressing against his teeth as he clenched his jaw.*

*"According to international law, and by request of the detective L . . ."*

*God, he was just so sorry that he had started any of this. It hurt, more than he had ever imagined pain could.*

*"Yagami Raito, alias Kira has been found guilty of what is estimated to be well over 3,500 counts of first-degree murder . . ."*

*And when he thought that he was sorry, it wasn't because of those people, those animals, those meaningless dregs he'd removed from the earth. It was L, and it was how he felt. But god, wasn't it always L . . .*

*"And is hereby sentenced to life in an undisclosed asylum for the criminally insane with no possibility of release or visitors. Court dismissed."*

*Raito's head snapped up and his eyes connected with the judge's cool black ones. He watched as the gavel struck the bench with an ominous bang.*

*And all hell broke loose.*

*All his carefully constructed control evaporated like so much water boiling over, and he had screamed. For the first time in his life, a real, primal scream of rage and terror.*

*L. L. L! It was all his mind could think of, and god, the pain was so bad, searing his body because this wasn't supposed to happen, he wasn't supposed to have to live with this!*

*His head whipped around and his eyes searched until they found L's insignia glowing on a monitor in the back of the room. He knew L could see him, and his lips curled as he felt his fear and anger overtake him. He was so focused on the laptop that he didn't realize that he was standing and moving until he felt strong hands holding him, pulling him backwards.*

*And he was in so much pain that he didn't realize how hard he fought his captors, how he was fighting back, kicking and screaming and struggling, until he felt the needle bite into his bicep and then the world went black and then after that, everything hurt even more.*

---

Raito jolts into consciousness, his head spinning at the suddenness of the transition. The first thing he notices is that his teeth ache and his throat is dry—he's been screaming, then, and clenching his teeth to try to stop himself.

The second thing he notices is L, sitting behind him, holding his trembling frame.

It is instinct, nothing more than a gut reaction, that dictates that Raito jerk away from him. "I'm fine," he mutters, his eyes on the comforter of the bed they share.

It is not as though he finds contact with L unsavory—quite the contrary, actually.

It is his mind, trained for years to think that L was something he couldn't have, didn't deserve to have, would never have. He had never planned on telling L the secret that had brought Kira down. It was only because L had asked the right questions that he had gotten the right answer. L had won, after all, and that meant that Raito had to answer any questions he had.

But it didn't mean that L had his pride.

"Raito-kun is not fine," L says, taking one of Raito's hands in both of his and examining it. Raito watches as L traces one of his deeper scars—the stark white tissues that wrap deep around his wrist like imitation handcuffs. L's fingers trace the mark gently, before moving up his forearm, feeling the ridges there from the burned and cut skin.

Raito sits patiently, shivering slightly at the sensation, because even though it's been well over a year, he still remembers that Crowley liked touching him like this, liked feeling the scars that he had inflicted earlier.

L notices Raito's trembling, but he continues. Raito needs to become more accustomed to human contact—and L knows that it is ironic that he, the antisocial pariah, is to be the one to help him with it. "What was Raito-kun remembering?" L asks, even though he knows that this is supposed to be a taboo topic.

Raito's eyes are hard and scared, and his arm trembles slightly in L's grasp. But he doesn't answer.

L's fingers travel up his arm and then move around to his back, where he traces meaningless patterns, his hands moving soft and soothing. "I need for Raito-kun to talk to me," L says. "He cannot keep silent."

"The trial," Raito says.

"What about it?"

"Why did you do that?" Raito demands, suddenly angry. "I remember . . . you said, you promised! God, why would you consign me to that kind of life?"

"Raito-kun forgets the thousands he murdered," L says, coldly. "I believe that I thought some sort of punishment was in order."

"I *confessed*," Raito hissed. "I confessed, and you promised me death."

"L does not make deals with murderers."

The anger seems to drain out of Raito. "I hated you for that," he says dully.

"And does Raito-kun hate me now?" L asks in a monotone.

"No. I can't hate you. No. That's not right. Sometimes I hate you. Other times, it's the opposite. And sometimes I can't stand you, and sometimes I'm scared of you. But most of the time, I can't not be by you. I can't not have you near me." Raito raises his eyes to meet L's. "But you already knew that, didn't you?"

L nods. "I had thought so."

"I hate that too," Raito says, weakly.

"I know." L's fingers continue shifting and gently tracing. "How did Raito-kun feel during his trial?"

Raito closes his eyes. "It hurt. I was . . . scared. And alone. I missed you."

L's fingers pause, and Raito's eyes snap open. "Is Raito-kun just saying that?" L asks.

Raito looks away, ashamed of how he felt, how he still feels. Ashamed, mostly, to still be alive. If he ever got the chance . . . if L ever leaves him alone . . . "No."

"Why did it hurt?"

"Everything hurts," Raito snaps, looking up again. "It started there." He pauses, remembering. "No, it started a long time before that."

"When Raito-kun regained his memories."

"Earlier."

"When he began killing people?"

"Earlier even than that. Before I even found the Death Note. It hurt, but I never noticed. Looking back though. It was just an empty feeling, lonely, never having anyone who was on my level, never expecting to . . ." Raito breaks off and sighs, glancing at the clock. "Six a.m.," he says. "I need to take my Amulspiride."

L reaches over and then hands Raito the small blue pill, which he swallow dry. He shivers slightly, and L reaches for him. "I'm fine," Raito says.

"Raito-kun is not fine," L murmurs, his eyes locking with Raito's.

Raito is still. "I'm better," he says.

"No."

"Better than I was before."

"Yes."

"Even if I still have to take medication."

"Raito-kun must become accustomed to medication, as it is highly likely he will be taking it for the rest of his life."

"L needs to become accustomed to the idea that the rest of my life may not be very much longer."

L is silent as the implications of Raito's words become apparent. He knows, of course, that Raito wishes for death. Or, rather, he knows that Raito wished for it. He did not know that Raito still considered the morbid option so appealing.

"Raito-kun should not attempt suicide," L finally says. "It would make me most unhappy, especially since I have gone to all this effort to make amends with him."

Raito is silent for a long time, his eyes cast down, examining the hand that L is not holding. The fingers twitch slightly—Dr. Cassar says that because of the nerve damage his hands have suffered, they will probably never be completely still. Raito has no feeling in most of his fingertips, and what he does feel is generally pain anyway. Finally, he says, "It's not that." He looks up again, meeting L's steady gaze. "It's not that," he repeats. "It's not . . . suicide that I'm thinking of. It just hurts, L. And it's hard to think of living for a long time when it feel so bad."

L blinks slowly. "Haven't things gotten even a bit better for Raito-kun?" he asks.

Raito nods, once. "Yes," he says curtly. "And it's not as though . . . I mean, I *am* Kira."

L breaks eye contact as Raito broaches the subject. He loathes discussing this; it reminds L of his greatest failure as a detective. But it is also, as Watari phrased it when L came to him for advice about his unique problem with Raito, perhaps L's greatest success as a human being.

"I am, L," Raito says softly.

"You were," L says obstinately.

"No," Raito corrects. "Just because I'm not killing people now—"

"Would you again?" L demands, asking a question that has been eating at him for months. "After all this, all these terrible mistakes and your imprisonment and confession and *this*—" here, L holds up their clasped hands for emphasis— "you would go back to murdering?"

Raito is already shaking his head, the corners of his mouth turning up in mild amusement, before L has finished. He gently brings their intertwined hands up to his mouth and brushes soft lips against L's wrist. "No," he says. "No, you won, L Lawliet."

L's breathing shallows when he hears Raito speak his name. "Then why do you say you are Kira?" he asks.

Raito's eyes are on L's face as he continues to press light kisses to L's hand and fingers. "It—the desire to control and destroy—is always part me," he says.

"Isn't that difficult," L asks, "to have different parts of you?"

"That's what medication is for, I suppose," Raito says lightly, trying to make a joke of it.

"Raito-kun has seemed to become more stable on this medication," L comments. "He doesn't have as many episodes as he used to."

"No, only one or two a week now," Raito concedes.

"Raito-kun doesn't remember being Kira," L says. "Why does he feel the need to cling to the knowledge that he once acted as a murderer?"

Raito is silent for so long that L moves closer to him, cautiously, slowly so as not to startle him. Raito still doesn't move, even when L slides his arms around him, holding him gently.

He shrugs. "If I don't remember, then I'll think everything happened for no reason. And that really would be unbearable."

"When he was here last, Matt mentioned that Ratio-kun seemed better."

"I suppose everything is getting better. Slowly."

L nods. Yes, he supposes so too.

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A/N: Before I get into anything else, I really wanted to thank everyone who's been reviewing so far. Getting a lot of reviews--especially the detailed or helpful kind!--really does help me post faster. This chapter. . . was a special case, as you'll see below. Anywho, I really, really appreciate the support. Love to everyone who's been so wonderful!!! ^-^

So I spent the last week nursing a lovely bout of the swine flu, plus midterms, plus trying to wrestle this chapter into submission. I wanted to totally reformat it but it kept sucking and I was finally reminded of why I used this format in the first place. So I decided to write a few new scenes, edit the crap out of it, and hand it over. And I know it's very very late BUT it's also twice as long as usual, which means 10,000 words, people. Enjoy XD I really hope everyone likes it; I was insecure about it when it was first posted, and I'm even more so now that I'm a better writer. Blah but I've babied it enough, and I'm just ill enough that I'm willing to post something I'm not totally happy about.

Do let me know if you liked it, since I'm not certain that I do. Anyways, thanks very much for reading!

## \*Chapter 9\*: Fade

### Chapter 9

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Gently, gently, there is routine. L is softer now, something that no one but Wammy notices. He doubts, actually, that even Light notices, because for how perceptive the boy can be, he is still too close to the situation to really know; much like being *in* an accident prevents its participants from remembering correctly. Like why witness' testimonies are given precedence over those of the victims or perpetrators of a crime.

Wammy is old now, and he knows that L notices, and is puzzled by it. For all L's genius, he has still not quite figured that people are so transitory, especially the people closest to him. It is a hard lesson, and one that Wammy hopes he will not become disillusioned by.

Because for all he and Light have been through, L still holds a spark of naïve optimism that Wammy hopes will never fade. For all the cruelty and debased evil L sees on a near daily basis—for all the pain he and Light go through every day—L still inexplicably holds the belief that things are going to be all right. Wammy doesn't know how he does it, but he does know that L is the world's greatest detective not because of his brilliance but because he has this ability. There are men smarter, faster, more ruthless that could do his job save they have already given up on the human race.

Light, of course, being the prime example.

Wammy and L have talked about it. Light is smarter, and it's not just the IQ tests that tell them so. They both knew that they would have been dead had Light not discovered a very human part of himself all those years ago—a part that he is still struggling with.

Wammy watches those struggles with sadness—but there is still a part of him (and not a terribly small part either) that sees the justice in his pain and his struggles. Wammy does not wish them on him, because he has come to love Light almost as he loves L, but he sees that it is almost right all the same.

Light has hurt a great many people, and if there is not earthly retribution, then surely there will be some in the afterlife. Wammy knows that neither L nor Light believe in a god, but his faith has not wavered throughout the years. He has seen too much *right* in the world not to not-believe.

But. Wammy is getting much older than he'd imagined he would, what with being L's partner. He really had expected death earlier than this (at the hands of Light Yagami, he'd once thought), and so it has been a pleasant surprise to see L grow and change and become *real*, three-dimensional. Even though the process had been painful.

Wammy is not sick or ailing by any means, but his body betrays him in little ways—how his knees don't work well on the stairs, how his back and fingers don't bend the way they used to; how his eyes are a little blurry and he sometimes uses his lip-reading skills because he cannot quite hear L speaking to him. He is nearly eighty and knows that he has perhaps ten years or a little more left in him; though it is still easy enough to pretend that he is young.

He hopes—and he knows that it is morbid to think of this, but he does anyway—that Light will be well enough by the time he passes on to take care of L. Not that L can't take care of himself, but . . . it is how L receives love, which is why Wammy has never minded bringing him food or taking care of the smaller things about L's life that he never wanted to do for himself. It is when L allows people to serve him that he lets them love him.

Wammy is perceptive—that is his skill, if he has any—and he can see how L fights against allowing Light Yagami to love him. Or perhaps he doesn't believe it, no matter what Light says.

He knows that L still feels aching, pressing guilt about Light's stay in the asylum. It is not directly his fault, but it certainly wouldn't have happened if he had had Light executed as planned. Not that Wammy blames him; L had explained once that redemption was always a possibility while Light was alive. But in death lay only tragedy.

Light has redeemed himself, at least in Wammy's eyes. And in L's too, he knows. Light is a wholly different person now, and not just because of his insanity. He has been humbled, made human, and he feels guilt every bit as strong as L when he thinks of his past as Kira.

Wammy is not especially involved in their day-to-day lives; he busies himself with helping with the running of the orphanage (found only an hour away from where they typically reside). But L seeks his opinion often, and they always take tea together when Wammy is present and Light is relatively normal.

Wammy thinks that Light likes him, or at least enjoys his company. The boy still seems to have some trouble looking him in the eye—Wammy thinks it's because he is ashamed of all he's done and he doesn't know if Wammy understands and accepts it the way L does. But when Light's feeling stable and safe, they've had great conversation, and each seems to have recognized the other as an ally.

Things, thank God, have settled into tentative routine. Wammy knows that Light having to take medication eats at both Light and L, but with it, they seem to have fallen into their respective places.

Light still seems so fragile to Wammy, though, and he doesn't know if L shares his viewpoint. To him, the former killer seems volatile still; like spun glass that hasn't quite hardened. He can still be twisted, with minimal effort, into another shape; but conversely, if he is thrown to the ground, he can also be shattered. The few times L has lost his temper with him have been enough to prove this, since it makes Light instantly contrite and apologetic and he walks on eggshells for days or weeks afterwards.

Generally, their routine makes it so that this sort of behavior is unnecessary. Wammy has their days marked and any disturbance in their schedule makes him on edge, waiting for the inevitable implosion. (Rarely, very rarely, it is an explosion; a fight, an argument, venting feelings through shouting and throwing a tantrum, but mostly, it is a quiet, horrible implosion where there is an awful silence that shudders through the house and makes everyone pause and just wait.)

But when days are peaceful (and more often than not, they are), there are normal meals and cases to work on and walks along English countryside and tea and breaks for chess or spirited arguing or watching the news.

And although these are the peaceful days and all three of them are grateful for them, they are still . . . very sad. And it's sad that sad is what is equilibrium these days for them. Wammy supposes that it is better than the old equilibrium L held back when Light was still in the asylum—that is to say, cold, unfeeling, and glassy-eyed—but it is still very difficult to watch some days.

Light is not whole and Wammy and L know it—what's worse, *Light* knows it. It would be one thing if he were unaware of the missing bits and went on regardless, but he knows and he sulks on it, licking wounds that only keep reopening because of his attentions. He cannot heal because, Wammy suspects, he subconsciously cannot allow himself to.

Not that there's much healing anyone can do after an experience like his.

But Light Yagami is *brilliant*. Not bright, not intelligent, not genius. He surpasses all of these, and his mind *could* heal (Wammy tentatively believes, but then he's always believed in miracles) if he would only believe itself deserving of being healed.

If only the gaps were filled in and he saw himself in completion—and then judged himself worthy of caring, of love, of attention. Of L's caring, and love, and attention. He's getting all those things regardless, but they mean next to nothing when he discards them as grounded in pity and regret.

Not that Wammy can blame him, to some degree. If he had done all that Light had, and then found out he was *wrong* in doing it, he would most likely take his own life, as Light may still wish to.

But, thankfully, Light is still indebted to L and will not do so as long as he feels that.

When he thinks about it like this, Wammy realizes that it sounds very harsh and sad, but things are not always like the picture he paints in his mind sometimes.

Today, for example, is a delightful example of what life could be and is sometimes like. Not that Wammy is personally involved, but he listens in as he sits in the room and works on paperwork for the new child at his orphanage.

Wammy watches as Light turns a fatalistic smile on L from where he sits.

L notices the smile; he always does. He turns in his chair and smiles back, a bit hesitantly, probably wondering if his reaction is going to startle Light out of his lazy reverie.

"Thank you," Light suddenly says. Wammy looks down to hide his own smile.

L blinks, and his smile turns wry. "Don't thank me," he tells him.

"Hmm?" Light asks.

"I'm not . . . I've done nothing worth gratitude, Light. But thank you for saying it all the same." Wammy notices that L glances briefly at him, probably wondering if he's going to get a lecture on self-deprecating behavior later, so Wammy makes a point of being industriously involved in his paperwork.

Light frowns a bit, still languidly. "It's funny to listen to you when your self-esteem has taken a hit," he murmurs. "Not ha-ha funny. Strange-funny."

"Glad I amuse you," L mutters back. He has obviously been thinking of something that has made him quite unhappy. Wammy wonders briefly why it is that Light and L never seem to be on the same frequency—L is down and Light is up and by the end of the day, they'll have probably swapped stations.

Light's smile turns sharp and he leans forward. "You do amuse me," he announces, "but you can usually tell that because when you do, I'm laughing."

"I'd noticed."

"You're a killjoy."

L stares at him like suddenly his skin has turned bright purple and he's sprouted antennae. "Did you just call me a killjoy?" he demands.

"You heard me," Light says lazily.

L's smile returns, sharper around the edges this time, and Wammy can sense a rising air of challenge like thickening clouds in the room. "I'm sorry, I didn't realize that you were in the entertaining mood. Perhaps you should announce it next time so I don't make the same mistake again."

"I could make signs and hold them up," Light suggests, using humor to unknot the tension skillfully, like tugging on strings and letting a tapestry unravel.

"Or we could build a marquee over the computers and you could type commands into them," L says, dropping his defensive attitude and warming up to the idea.

"Set commands could be more fun," Light speculates. "Or a fill-in-the-blank answer."

"Multiple choice?" L asks, raising his eyebrows. "It doesn't always have to be an essay question, you know. Sometimes, a few words will suffice."

Light's smile is positively wicked. "We could use emoticons," he announces.

This surprises a laugh out of L, and Wammy has forgotten how much he's missed hearing it.

"I'll concede to that," L says, nodding. "I have no better suggestions."

"We should also include a section on the marquee for a scoreboard. So far, today, I'm winning."

"We should play chess, then, so I can catch up," L suggests.

"I bet I can beat you," Light says with casual arrogance, and it makes him both sad and desperately happy to see an old light returning to L's eyes. If only it could be like this always.

"In checkers, maybe. Or Go Fish."

"I'll beat you in those too," Light informs him, standing to get the chessboard.

"And we'll do paper-rock-scissors to decide the winner in the event of a tie?"

"Too blasé. We'll have a recitation contest. Haiku versus Shakespeare."

"Of course, how silly of me. And how will we determine who's won?"

Light reaches the cupboard and winces a little as he has to stretch to reach the board. He tries to shake off the sinking feeling the little glimmer of pain produces. "Wammy can be our judge," he suggests, glancing over at him "though he favors you, so I'll have to have a handicap." He hands the chessboard to L, who has steadier hands, to set up.

Wammy smiles indulgently, suggesting with his gesture that he'd be happy to judge

Midway through the game, when Wammy rather thinks that they've both forgotten he's even there (they'll do that when they're concentrating, the both of them), L glances up and says, "Can I ask you a question?"

Light doesn't look up from the knight he seems to be contemplating massacring. "Sure."

"Why . . . why can't it always be like this?" L asks. "I mean . . . please don't take it the wrong way, but . . . what stops you? From being like this?"

Light's smile is dry when he looks up, but to L's relief he still looks completely sane. "I don't know, L," is his answer. "I almost never feel this content, I suppose. But I don't know why. I never know when it's going to hit or how long it's going to stay. Something could trigger it, but sometimes nothing does. It's called being crazy."

L frowns and focuses on the gameboard and recovering from Light's latest attack. "You don't seem crazy now," he murmurs.

"Read your psychology books," Light suggests. "I know you have a fair few. This is the in between stage we almost never get to enjoy."

Wammy had thought that Light had forgotten about him; but he's proved wrong now, when Light glances over at him, as though he thinks Wammy is going to contribute to the conversation or contradict him.

"It just . . . doesn't even seem like the same person."

"Do you know, it doesn't seem like the same person to me either?" Light replies. "But this is the most comfortable state of mind I've found. I'm less than what I was, but it's still enough."

"Hmmm," L says, reaching down to shift a piece.

"It's nice, though, isn't it?" Light asks, glancing up at him with cautious amber eyes. Wammy wonders what Light is afraid of L saying to that, that he would be so wary. "That I can be reasonable?"

"Yes," L says with a content sigh, even as Light puts him in checkmate, "it is nice."

They go on to play a few more rounds and then a tiebreaker round, poetry altogether forgotten. And neither notices when Wammy slips out of the room to drive down to the orphanage a few hours later.

It's memories like this that sustain L during the darker times, Wammy knows—times which were and are so much more common than the quiet, good times. Even when L wanted to run or when he was so caught up in his own anger and grief, memories like this sustain him and buoy him enough that he keeps his (and Light's) head above the

water.

Wammy never thought L would be one of those people who was happy when they got through a single day without drowning—when just the smallest of victories meant so much, or when they could manage to live on the very edge of complete destruction. But Light has changed that; Light changes a lot of things and some are good and some are bad but essentially . . . L cannot live without him anymore.

In one of his more romanticized moments, L casually mentioned that he thought maybe that, to some degree, was what love was.

Wammy thinks that, for those two—who are fiercely independent, stubborn, and broken in a desperate, beautiful sort of way—maybe it is.

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The graceful arms of winter enfold them nearly two years after Light has been out of the asylum, and Light has to remind himself to wonder at the harsh beauty of the frozen scenery. Not that he isn't grateful, not that he's forgotten the long years when all he saw was the brown-gray enclosure of patchy grass and tamped down earth that the prisoners were allowed out in once a week or the monochrome prison of his solitary cell; but sometimes, he gets so caught up in the inside of his life, he forgets to look at the outside.

L finds him outside one January day; Light has grown accustomed to his daily walks, and though it's below freezing, he can't break himself of the habit. Besides, the fresh air helps when he's feeling trapped by the too-many memories he's weighted down with. (And when he thinks that, he smiles in bitter irony, because even though there are too many sins to count on his head, even though there are too many things to think on, he still wants his other memories back, the ones L burned up and discarded.) And even though his gait is slow and a tad unsteady still, he is practicing and getting better all the time.

He's shivering—not just shaking like he normally does, but actually trembling from the cold, and when L walks out, he drapes a heavy winter coat over his shoulders. Light pulls it tight around him and pulls it on properly.

"Wammy said I should give that to you," L says with a shrug.

Light glances down with some amusement. "Did he also tell you to put those boots on?" he asks.

L grimaces. "Yes. Something absurd about frostbite."

"Worrywart," Light comments, gazing off. It's just beginning to snow, and the effect of the effervescent gray clouds combined with the sight-impairing appearance of floating flakes makes everything hazy and soft, like a kind of heaven. Light's breath clouds in front of him as he gazes towards distant hills, blanketed in gentle weather. His brow furrows a bit (he can barely feel it, it's nearly numb from the cold) as he bats away memories that threaten to overwhelm him. He's gotten good at avoiding them, and not-thinking. But when tense conversation arises, or when he is left on his own too long, there is not much hope for his stability.

Light does remember the last time he felt stable, back in the hospital, and he wishes for that moment back with all his being sometimes, remembering that soft, peaceful moment when he was so frightened and yet . . . not frightened at all, compared to what came next. What he has now.

Now, at least, out here in the snow, he is not terribly afraid. L is next to him, and that usually makes things easier. As of late, though, and for reasons he won't even admit to himself, L is making things more strained than simple.

The problem, when stripped to its very core, is this: Light loves him. Wants him. On every level.

It is not a problem until memories from the Kira case and the asylum start spreading like a virus, spiderwebbing out into his mind and twisting that want into shame and fear.

And even though closeness helped in the beginning, lately . . . lately, even kissing makes Light shudder and pull away. He doesn't remember when he starting thinking it, but he does remember thinking in the asylum how he could never have L and how that is now more a part of his personality than he could have ever believed. He knows that even back during the Kira case, he despaired of ever having this ephemeral, nearly ethereal creature that was chained to him, that jarred his senses and destroyed his mind on a daily basis. Especially after he'd gotten a hold of the Death Note again.

L does not think about Kira, Light can tell. Perhaps it is easy for him, perhaps he has to work at it. But either way, Light can tell that he finds it an unsavory subject.

Light himself doesn't exactly enjoy dwelling on the fact that he is a mass murderer a thousand times over, but it was—*is*—such a vital, integral part of who he is that it is quite impossible to ignore.

At least . . . Light imagines that it is an important piece of him. He can't remember, so . . . Well, L thought he was doing what was best, burning the Death Note.

It is one of the strangest, most difficult things he's ever had to do, to attempt to reconstruct a psyche that is missing thousands of memories, tens of thousands of moments and decisions that made him who he is now, yet . . . not. He is trying to reconcile the him he knows now, the one before all the Kira business (who he can barely remember anyways, all he knows is that that version of him was impossibly naïve and wretchedly content), the Kira part of him and the Light in the asylum. They're all so different, it's like watching a movie when he remembers. So he lives with his not-memories, his knowledge of his sins but no recollection to cement his grief and make him capable of digesting, justifying, and healing.

And it's not as though Light finds murder so very terrible. As he helps L with his cases, Light finds himself wishing he had a Death Note to speed things along, since it is so obvious who the culprit is.

Despite the gaping hole in his memories, Light has no illusions about who and what he is. Yet he cannot help thinking that he was at one time stronger than he is now, that long ago, back in the early stages of his stay in the asylum, he had a better grasp on reality, he was able to better resist the seductive call of insanity and delusion and losing himself in the terrifying world of pain.

Light winces even *thinking* about that pain. While it was true that the human mind could only recreate emotional pain, not the physical, the memories were enough to make up the difference. And besides, there had been plenty of emotional pain—prevalent among those emotions was the feeling of being lost, betrayed, abandoned. There was no exact word he felt in any of the languages he spoke. The closest word in the English language was, simply, *alone*. More alone than he could have imagined existed back in his safe and secure home in Japan.

If the physical pain is what ultimately broke his mind, then it is the emotional pain (the degradation, the alone-ness, the humiliation) that keeps him feeling broken. Even with all his medication, he cannot bury this *painachescreamfeargrief* that shakes him straight to his center and leaves him trembling for hours and hours. For days. For always.

Even though there are gaping holes in his memory, he still retains too many of them for his tastes. The physical torture, yes, but also the screaming certainty that he was going insane. He can remember this, remember feeling it like it wasn't even a part of him, moving like cold water in his veins, freezing him, stopping his heart. He could *feel* that insanity, ready and waiting to take him to a place not even his exceptional mind could decipher. Many people would want to tell him that that was impossible, that crazy people don't know they're crazy.

Lie.

Light can tell, and it *kills* him.

The creep of insanity, the aching loneliness of solitary confinement for two years (and that makes him shudder, just the momentary glance over his shoulder into the too-near past) all weigh heavy on his mind. Yet the first three years, when he was free as any other prisoner were their own kind of special hell; and the treatment he suffered at the hands of the other inmates (one in particular, but Light shakes his head, not thinking about that, not thinking about that, *not thinking about him*) is something he refuses to consider.

L helps, when Light is trying not to think about anything, or when his mind is just so tired he can't help himself at all. Light can turn to him, and L somehow knows when he's had enough, and he does his best to distract him.

It even works, until Light has to go to bed.

Now, though, he takes another deep breath and releases it, watching it cloud white and spiral in arcane patterns until it dissipates into the rest of the frozen air. He tenses his muscles against the cold and the aching despair that his thoughts have taken him to, and looks up.

L is watching him. *As though he ever does anything else*, Light thinks, and surprises himself with the harsh tones in his own thoughts.

"I'm going in," Light tells him, turning ninety degrees and taking a nearly-concealed path up to the house. He doesn't know if L follows or not (but he does, he always follows and God damn it, Light doesn't deserve it).

Aspen trees—Light's favorites, usually—still tremble in the bitter wind, but they're stripped now of their pale green leaves and now the white bark, so striking in the summer, only blends into the scenery. Light walks past them and doesn't bother to look; he thinks that he should probably get in before the episode he's feeling behind his eyes—making them itch and burn—begins and he can't see anything at all. He could ask for L's help, but . . . well, that would be asking, then, wouldn't it? And Light knows that he is so far beneath L, knows how much he owes him, and cannot stand to be in any more debt to him than he already is.

And L, not confused by his behavior as he had been in the past, follows behind him, ready and waiting to catch him if he fell.

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A/N: This is actually the last chapter--save a short epilogue that I'll post within a number of days. Fret not, however! I have nine chapters of the sequel, and I am curious to know what issues everyone thinks still need to be resolved. For those of you who read much of the sequel last time around--no cheating! XD

Also: I know what you're going to say. Bahari, really? Well over a week? Two weeks? How long has it even been? Well, let me tell you that this chapter is entirely new material, and that I wrote a great number of versions of this ending because I was quite unsatisfied with it last time around. But now I'm happy, so you all get to share in my joy!

Please do let me know what you thought! I appreciate everyone's thoughts and comments!

## \*Chapter 10\*: Epilogue

### Part 10

Edited and Reposted as of 10.18.09

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"I know him."

It has been well over two years since Light has been living in normal society. In that time, L has gradually been working him up to a level in which Light is able to solve crimes alongside L. L thinks that it might not have been Light's first choice for a career—hell, he *knows* that it wouldn't be Light's first choice. But it is what L has, and what Light will accept.

And the regular work helps; truly it does. Wammy thinks so too, which helps L's confidence when nothing seems to be working at all. But having a schedule firmly in place—and work that challenges both their minds, keeps them focused on things that are not themselves—keeps Light's mind from turning away from him.

Now, L glances back at Light, who is leaning over his shoulder, examining the list of criminals he is scrolling through. L blinks, registering his earlier comment. "You know whom?" he asks.

Light leans in closer, and L forgets their conversation for a split second as he allows himself to inhale deeply Light's scent. It is of soft soap and warm skin, and L still has found nothing he likes better, not even his sweets. Light does not notice, and instead points with one scarred finger. "Him," he says, singling out a picture.

Frowning, L spins around in his chair. "No, you don't," he corrects. The revelation—false or not—jars him. Light cannot know him; he is doing this to piss L off, or perhaps he is confused himself.

"Yes I do," Light argues irritably, leaning away. He keeps his eyes on the picture.

"Who does Light-kun think he knows?" L asks, quirkng an eyebrow in challenge.

Light stares at L for a moment (a relief, L admits, because he does not like the look Light is giving the static image on the computer), but then he looks back at the computer screen, where a pale-faced man grins in his mug shot.

"B," Light says, the single syllable making L flinch. "Backup. Rue Ryuuzaki."

L stares at Light for a long moment before his frown deepens, and he spins back around to face the computer. He is scowling, struggling with echoes of the past, echoes of past failures, when he speaks next. "Of course you do," he murmurs, keeping his voice monotone only with great effort. "Why wouldn't you? Why should I expect the world to make sense anymore? At this point, it's not even naïvety on my part—it's pure stupidity."

Light stares at the back of L's head, startled at his reaction. "I didn't want to meet him," he finally says, a bit defensively. "I didn't want to. But he was there—in the asylum. Before I was put in solitary, we met."

*Ratio remembers this quite well—because he thought it must be a hallucination. Within the first month of his stay at the asylum, when he had still been foolish enough to believe he could escape.*

*He had been wandering the outside yard during exercise time, looking for possible weaknesses. And then he had stopped. Because there, 100 yards away, was L. Just standing there. Staring up at the fence with a scowl Light had certain never seen.*

*Cautiously, Light had moved forward. And as he got closer, 50 yards way, 30, then 10, he had slowed and finally stopped. And who he thought was L from a distance had turned. Light had known, as he saw the red eyes flash, that there was no way this was L.*

"There were a great number of inmates," L snaps, still not turning around. Light stands where he is, awkwardly. "Why did Light-kun choose to make friends with this one?"

"We weren't friends," Light says, and his voice is scathing. The tone makes L glance over at him; it has been a long time since Light has sounded so frustrated with him. But then, he is being especially obnoxious. "We weren't friends," he repeats. "And you are acting like a child, L. The only reason I even noticed him was because he looks exactly like you."

"Not exactly," L bites out, turning in his chair again to face Light, who looks as though he'd like to take a step back.

"No, not exactly," Light agrees, his face still darkened by his scowl. "But from a distance—very similar. He noticed me staring."

*The other man stared back at him. And for a moment, neither spoke or moved. Then, L's double had grinned, and Light couldn't fathom how he had thought that this man looked like L.*

"Yagami Tsuki," he had said.

Light had stared. "N-No," he'd managed after a moment.

"No?" the other man asked, cocking his head to the side in a gesture similar to—but not exactly like—one of L's. "Who are you then?"

"Light." He'd been just startled enough into truth.

"I see." The other man's grin widened. "Why are you staring?"

Light had hesitated then, gaining back some of his sense before he answered. "Who are you?" he finally asked.

"Of course he did," L murmurs. "It never escaped B's notice when he had another's attention."

"He guessed that I was Kira," Light says.

"I'm B," L's doppleganger had told him gleefully, advancing on him slowly with an expression of a child

Light had taken a step back. He already had a headache from the shock therapy he'd had an hour ago, and he couldn't really think through it. "What are you?" he'd asked.

"I could ask you the same question," B had said. His eyes were above Light's head. "No lifespan . . ."

"Shinigami eyes," Light had said, realizing suddenly. He had been about to say more when B had interrupted.

"Shinigami?" B quoted, eyes growing rounder. Then, after another moment of thought, he breathed, "Kira," and began laughing.

Light had been so startled he hadn't even bothered denying it. If this strange creature knew about Shinigami and, presumably, Death Notes, was there a way to use that? To use him?

"Did you think I was L?" B asked after he'd regained his breath, and Light was thrown for another loop. He had flinched at hearing the name, and he certainly didn't answer. "You did," B said, laughing. "That's wonderful," he continued. His laughter subsided into dark chuckling as he looked Light over carefully. "Absolutely wonderful."

"I'm not surprised," L says. He has no desire to continue this conversation, no desire to tell Light more about B than he already knows.

"He told me about Wammy's," Light adds, and his lips twitch into a smile as L goes very still.

"Light-kun has a talent for rooting out my secrets, no matter how much I wish they could stay buried."

"It says here that B's escaped," Light says conversationally, slipping into the chair next to L, choosing to ignore L's previous comment.

L turns back around to face the screen as well. "And so it does," he says, a bit too nonchalantly for Light's tastes. It isn't like L to be like this about a criminal. "It is not the first time."

"Why not execute him?" Light asks.

L gives him a level look. "Death is too good for someone like B," he says, no repentance in his voice. "It gives me more peace of mind to think of him rotting in an asylum."

"Cruel." Light isn't judging, only testing.

"I can afford to be cruel when it comes to B. He is a truly insane, truly malicious little creature."

Light's eyes roam over B's picture, and L doesn't like the calculating, smooth expression on Light's face. "I bet I know where he is," Light says.

L stares, almost afraid to ask. But eventually, he does. "How?"

Light smiles. "He told me."

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A/N: Finished! \*brushes hands briskly together\* Well, then, I know that that epilogue was brief, and the REAL ending was last chapter BUT. Never fear, I have the first chapter of the sequel ready and raring to go! Go on--let me know how much you adored this story, and how horrible I am for not updating sooner, and how you'll die if I don't post the sequel. I'm ready for you! XD